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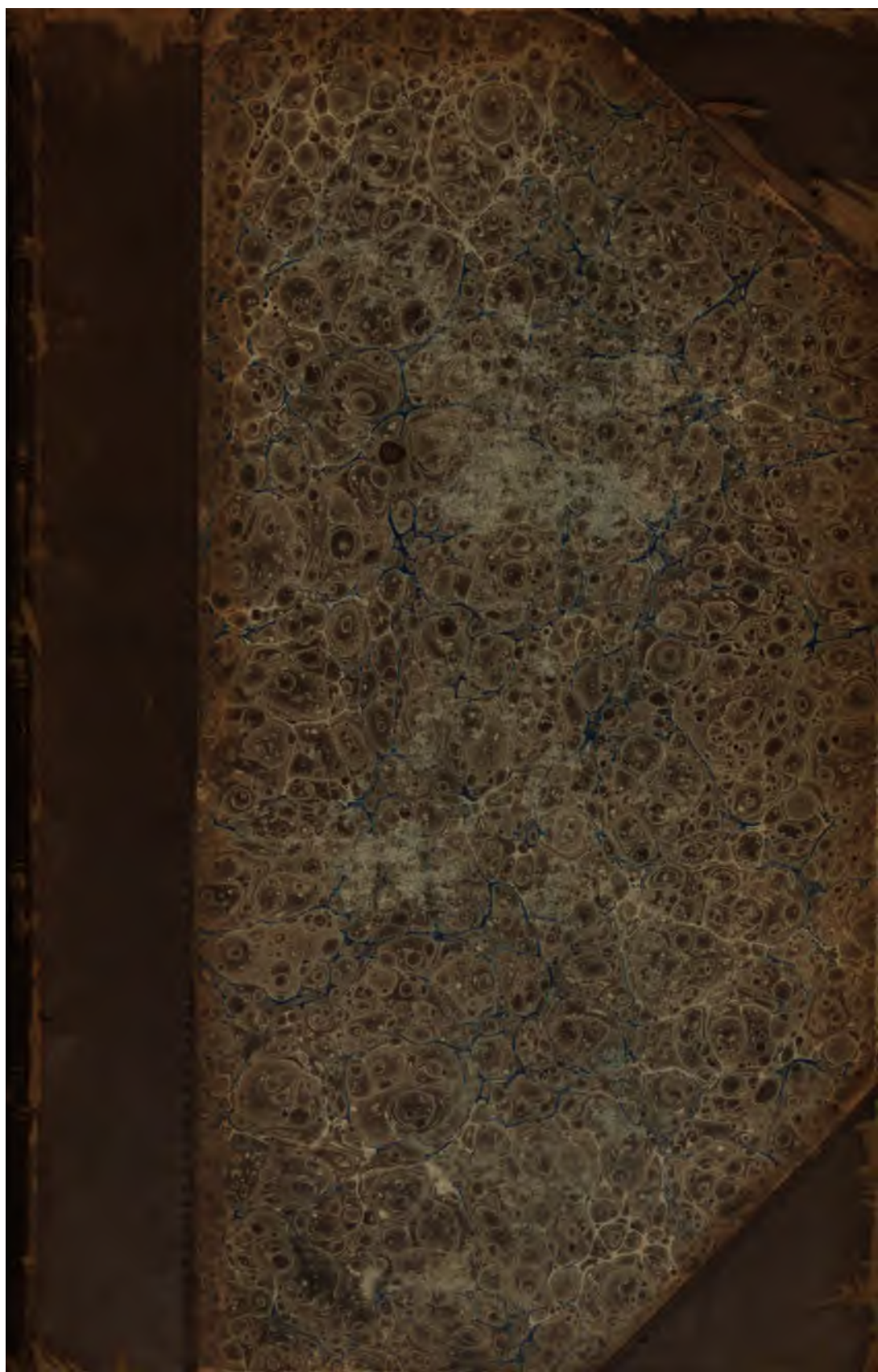
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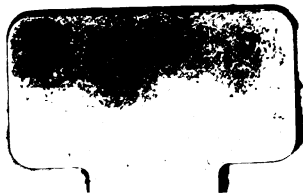




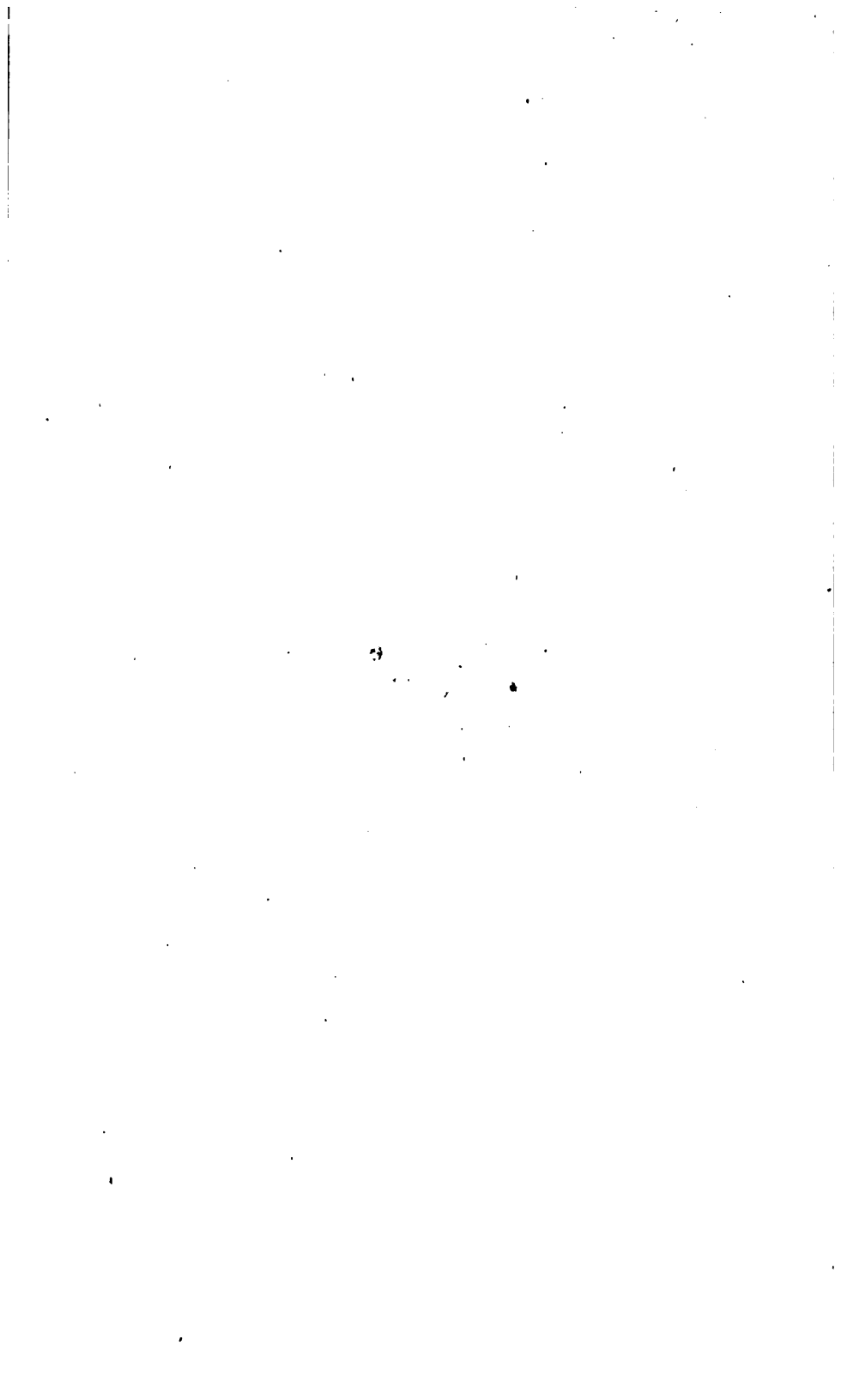
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*S.H. 1831.*

# S E R M O N S

PREACHED AT THE TEMPLE CHURCH

BY THE

REV. W. H. ROWLATT, M.A.

READER AT THE TEMPLE,

AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HON. LADY GIFFORD.



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TO THE  
REVEREND THE MASTER,  
TO THE WORSHIPFUL THE TREASURERS, AND THE  
MASTERS OF THE BENCH,  
AND THE REST OF THE MEMBERS,  
OF THE TWO HONOURABLE  
SOCIETIES OF THE TEMPLE,  
THESE SERMONS  
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,  
BY THEIR FAITHFUL  
AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.





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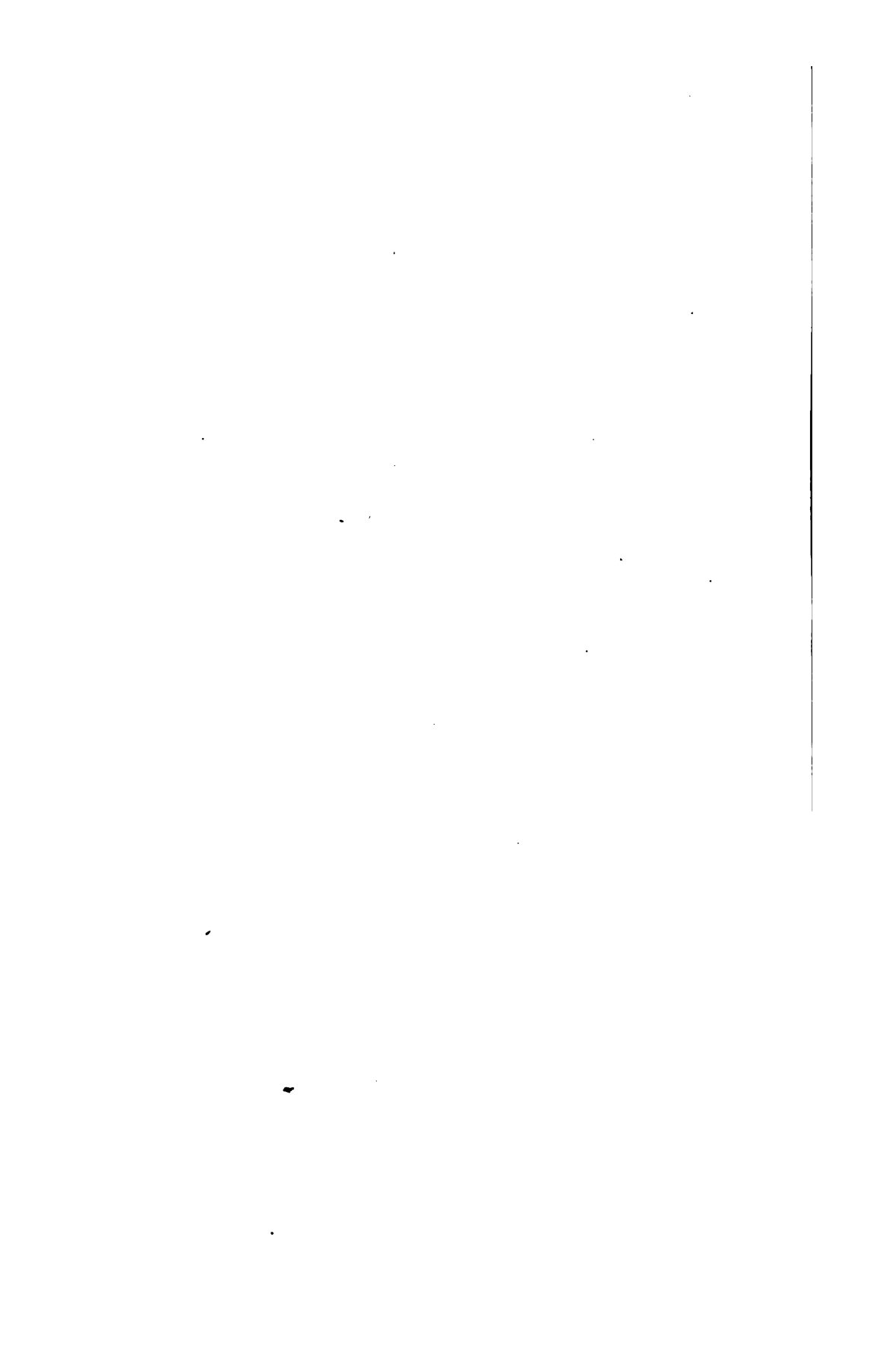
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# SERMON I.

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HEBREWS ix. 26—28.

*Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

THESE words embrace the whole doctrine of our Church upon those solemn subjects, which at this season of the year naturally claim our serious attention. I mean the first and the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although so many ages have elapsed since the former took place, and many more may roll away before the latter shall be accomplished, they still affect us with unabated interest, and irresistibly demand our deepest consideration. Of all the generations of men that have hitherto existed, and passed away

from the earth, the eternal destiny of every individual hangs suspended upon the truth of this awful doctrine. To all who now exist, it offers the most powerful motives, to fix their religious faith, and to improve in holiness of life. When we are satisfied of the truth of the first advent of our Saviour, our belief in his second coming will be almost its inevitable result. And when we reflect upon the alternatives which that great event will present to us, it seems impossible that we should hesitate to make it the chief business of our lives, seriously to prepare for it.

The substance of the text then may be resolved into these two points: first, the fact of our Saviour's first coming and its object; and secondly, the promise of his future coming, with its consequences. In discussing these propositions, some topics will probably arise of considerable difficulty: in which we must content ourselves with approximating to the truth, rather than attaining it. But this should not be a matter of surprise to us, or any ground of doubt. On the contrary, it is in reality, when well considered, a firm foundation for confidence. The analogy between what we learn by our senses and reflection,

and what we are taught by revelation, is complete. In both our knowledge is partial and imperfect : but in both it extends far enough for all the purposes of our present being and our future hopes. But the very fact that we *can* clearly discern, even in the present world, that there is *much* whose existence is certain, though it lies beyond the reach of our faculties to penetrate it, is sufficient to convince us, that those faculties will be hereafter further developed, and enabled to comprehend the essences of things, which at present are totally concealed from our understandings. And if such is the state in which we actually find ourselves with regard to this life, is it wonderful that a similar obscurity should prevail with regard to another? Would it not be far *more* astonishing, if the Almighty had afforded us clearer perceptions of the world to come, than he has thought fit to accord us of that which now is?

The first thing which calls for our notice, is the fact of our Lord's first advent. "Almost every thing in our religion (says the late excellent Bishop Horne) is historical." When I consider how just this observation is, it *seems* strange that so many writers, and even

very good ones, should labour to undervalue what they call historical belief; and to treat it as something quite different from what the Scriptures recognise under the term faith. I own that I cannot perceive the soundness or the utility of this distinction. That a mere formal declaration of assent to the truth of Christianity, without suffering it to have any influence over our lives, is not Scriptural faith, I readily admit. But neither is such conduct consistent with a sincere and conscientious belief of it. Nor can it be denied, that Christians unhappily deduce very different creeds and very different doctrines from the same Scriptures; but still, whatever be their creed or their doctrines, and whether they have much or no effect upon their conduct, the Christian revelation is strictly historical; and our belief in it must be founded in our conviction of the veracity of those who have handed it down to us.

But although it is undoubtedly a matter of history, it is discriminated from all other histories by circumstances altogether peculiar and important. And first by that which our services, at this time particularly, force upon our attention; that it is a history of events

*foretold.* That the Old Testament, from the beginning to the end of it, abounds with predictions, more or less clear and positive, of the advent of the Messiah, is not disputed. It is true that the Jews, to whom they were given, do not understand them as we do. But they agree with us (which is most material) that they *are* prophecies of the coming of *such* a person as him in whom we believe they were accomplished. That these Scriptures were in being for many centuries before the appearance of our Saviour, and were always substantially the same as they are now, is also another point that cannot be disputed. And that a prophetic character had constantly been ascribed to them, and had been widely circulated, is evident; because we have it from Roman Historians<sup>1</sup> of the highest credit, that “there had prevailed all over the east, an ancient and uniform opinion, founded upon the writings of the priesthood, that out of Judea would go forth a race of men, to extend their dominion over the rest of the world.” The only use that I

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius and Tacitus, as quoted by Paley in his Evidences, Vol. I. p. 22.

would now make of this passage is to prove, that those parts of the Old Testament, which we consider to be prophetic, were always so considered. And when we reflect upon their number, and the variety of minute particulars which they contain; all of which (to say the least) may, without any very forced construction, be applied to the person and the history of Jesus Christ, it raises a very strong presumption, that they have rightly been so applied. But when we consider the great body of evidence that we have, of the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament; and what, upon the *lowest* estimation, it proves the Author of our religion to have been, how *can* we refuse our credit to him, when we are told, that *he expounded to his disciples, from Moses and all the Prophets, the things concerning himself*, and consequently, that all those events which, we are assured by the Evangelists, happened to fulfil certain predictions, rest upon his own authority, and were derived by those writers immediately from himself?

It may seem, at first sight, very extraordinary that so many of the Jews, who were familiar with these prophecies, should, notwith-

standing his numerous miracles, have been unconvinced by his declaration, that he *was* the person to whom they referred, and in whom they terminated. This has not escaped the notice of a late celebrated historian; who has observed, in his peculiar manner, that "in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people seem to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses<sup>1</sup>." But he has omitted to add, in order to account for this, (though he could not have been ignorant of it) that this their character and conduct, is itself the subject of prophecy from Moses to Isaiah. Insomuch that this incredulity of the Jews, in our Saviour's Messiahship, is in fact one of the strongest arguments of its truth: as their general belief in him would not have been a fulfilment, but a contradiction of their Scriptures. And their very existence at this time, and under their present circumstances, is a powerful corroboration both of the Mosaic and of the Christian dispensations.

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon's Decline and Fall, chapter 15.



He has noticed, also, as a circumstance unfavourable to Christianity, that its first apologists, "when they would demonstrate its divine origin, insisted much more strongly on the predictions which announced, than on the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Messiah<sup>1</sup>." But surely they were well justified in so doing. Miracles are the best evidence of a divine revelation to eye-witnesses, and perhaps to their contemporaries. But when a considerable time has elapsed, they rest entirely upon the credit due to the veracity of their relators. But a prediction, and its alleged accomplishment, is a matter of which every man may judge for himself; it loses nothing by the lapse of time, and when he is satisfied of its truth, it has all the force of a miracle, submitted to his own observation.

That the power of foretelling the advent of the Messiah should have been confided to the Jews, who as a nation have not yet profited by it, may *also* to some persons appear strange. But it should be recollected, that the prophecies relating to that event, date from the com-

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, as before.

mencement of that dispensation of the Almighty, of which *they* were the sole depositaries. That from them they *might*, and in fact *did*, spread generally throughout the world. That their rejection of our Saviour, so far from being inconsistent with these predictions, is (as I have already observed) not obscurely intimated by them ; and that it can only be attributed to their possession of that free will, without which they could not be accountable creatures. Nor is it unreasonable to think that the rejection of Christianity by the Jews, aided its reception by the Gentiles. And that at this day it is more extensively professed on that account, than it would otherwise have been. And that as all things are foreknown in the counsels of God, or rather, perhaps we should say, seen as present ; and that his decrees are concurrent with his foreknowledge, rather than dependent upon it, he has ordained, that as they were the first to reject his religion, so they should be the last to profit by it ; but that after it shall have gradually triumphed over all other erroneous systems of faith, *they* also shall be converted by it, so that, in the language of our Saviour, *there shall be one fold and one*

*shepherd* : and in that of Isaiah, *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

But not only is the history of the advent of our Saviour distinguished from other histories by being foretold ; it is also confirmed, as perhaps no other history of equal antiquity is, by the evidence of present facts. The existence of Christians by name at this day is almost a proof that Christ came into the world, and performed and suffered those things which are related in the Scriptures. For we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that *the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* And from that time to the present, there is an unbroken chain of evidence, that *that* appellation has continued to describe the believers in Jesus. I have not entered into these considerations so much for the purpose of establishing the mere fact of our Saviour's first advent, of which I do not know that any doubt has ever been entertained, as to shew the connection of that event with the ancient Jewish prophecies, which is one of the main pillars upon which the truth of our holy religion rests ; and to prepare for the elucidation of the next point contained in the text :

namely, the object of his coming, which is distinctly stated to have been *To put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*. But before we proceed with this matter I must just notice a preceding expression, which seems to require some explanation. Christ is stated to have appeared *once in the end of the world*. The original literally translated would be, at the conclusion of the ages, which some commentators understand to signify, the conclusion of the Mosaic dispensation; and others to mean the last of the dispensations which God intended to give to mankind; that is to say, the Christian revelation, both of which, as they were coincident, in point of time, amount to the same thing. That what is commonly understood by the end of the world, could not be intended, is obvious; but to enter into it *now* would be to anticipate what I shall have to offer in a future discourse upon the latter part of the text.

I come then to the consideration of the great object of Christ's first advent, which the Apostle here declares, in conformity with many passages of the Gospels, to have been *to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*. A subject than which one more diffi-

cult to comprehend is certainly not to be found in the whole compass of our religion: which seems indeed to be so repugnant to the understandings of many, who profess to be, nevertheless, sincere Christians (whom it would be very uncharitable not to believe to be good men, and very absurd to deny to be able men), that they “explode (as their phrase is) the doctrine altogether, as irrational, unscriptural, and derogatory from the divine perfections; and contend that Christ died only as a martyr to the truth, and as a necessary preliminary to his resurrection<sup>1</sup>.” How they can reconcile this opinion with the unequivocal language of the text, and the tenor of the whole argument of the Epistle from which it is taken, with the exclamation of St. John, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*, or with our Saviour’s own assertion, that *He came to give his life a ransom for many*, I profess not to know. Probably in the same way to which they are compelled to have recourse, when they would evade or deny the doctrine of his divinity: namely, by distorting every text in

<sup>1</sup> Belsham’s *Calm Enquiry*, page 450.

which it is asserted, from its plain and obvious sense, into a fanciful and figurative meaning. That this mode of interpreting Scripture is utterly unwarrantable, and, if adopted, would lead to nothing but uncertainty, or would even tend to undermine its authority altogether, must be evident to every man upon the slightest reflection.

We must consider then the text as one of the clearest in favour of the doctrine of the atonement, of the proper vicarious sacrifice of Christ: who, according to St. Peter, *once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.* Remote as this must be confessed to be from our apprehensions, it is singular how it falls in with the system of the Mosaic sacrifices, regarding them as typical of the great Christian Sacrifice. But even they are involved in so much obscurity, that it is debated at this hour, with equal zeal, and confidence, and talent on both sides, whether they be of divine or human original. If we are governed by our present notions of what is rational and worthy of the Supreme Being, we shall probably incline to the latter opinion. But if we carry our thoughts back to the infancy

of the world, and are guided by what the Scriptures of the Old Testament disclose of its history, and of the administration of God's Providence at that remote period ; we shall, perhaps, hesitate in coming to that conclusion. One thing at least is clear, that, however they originated, they formed a very essential and a very important part of the Mosaic institutions. And yet it is equally clear, that they were never supposed to have any inherent efficacy in themselves. That they could possess any real value in the sight of God seems to have been regarded, by several writers of the Old Testament, to have been as impossible, *then*, as it can be now. For what was the language of Samuel to Saul? *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* And this impression seems to acquire greater force, as we advance in the Jewish history. How contemptuously the Prophet Isaiah spoke of them we have heard in the first lesson for this day—*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord ; I am full of the burnt-offer-*

*ings of rams and the fat of fed beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.* And when we come to the great author of the text, and consider the object of his Epistle to the Hebrews, it is evident that he regarded the Mosaic sacrifices, as having little or no virtue in themselves, but as types and shadows of that real and effective sacrifice, which the Saviour of mankind had offered upon the cross.

And yet St. Paul had been a Jew, *brought up* (as he tells us himself) *after the strictest sect of their religion, a Pharisee.* That sect which was most exact in their observance of ceremonial duties, and who, no doubt, attached considerable importance to them. Even he assures us, that *it is not possible that the blood of bulls, and of goats, should take away sins.* Whence then, we may ask, had this new light broken in upon his mind? Is it conceivable that he should all at once, by the mere natural exercise of his faculties, have discovered the *real object* of those rites of his religion ; and that it was so different from that to which he had been, till then, so obstinately devoted? Will the mere fact of his miraculous conversion to



Christianity account for this? I think not: And that no other probable solution of the matter can be given, than that which he himself constantly insisted upon in almost all his Epistles:—that he was supernaturally instructed in all those doctrines, which he so zealously, and so successfully inculcated. When he assures the Corinthians, that *his speech and his preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, and when he certifies to the Galatians that *the Gospel which he preached was not after man, for that he neither received it of man, nor was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*; and when of all this, he makes this solemn ratification: *Now the things which I write unto you, behold! before God, I lie not: if we should still require any proof of his veracity in these declarations, I would confidently appeal to his whole Epistle to the Hebrews, as containing internal evidence that his mind was preternaturally illuminated by the Spirit of God; and enabled to understand, and to develope, in the masterly manner that he has done, the connection of the ancient Levitical sacrifices with the one oblation of*

himself once offered by Jesus Christ, for the sins of mankind.

Such having been the object of our Saviour's first advent, it is surely fit that our minds should be deeply impressed with it at all times, but particularly at this period of its annual commemoration. That it should induce us to resolve, instantly and seriously, to obey the injunction of the Apostle, *to cast away the works of darkness, and to put upon us the armour of light*: remembering in what an awful state of peril we must be placed if we neglect it. For *if we sin wilfully, after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins: but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation*. And this would naturally lead us to the consideration of the latter part of the text; which speaks of Christ's appearing *a second time unto salvation*. But this is too copious a subject for the present, and must, therefore, be reserved for another opportunity.

In the mean time, let me earnestly exhort you (as it is my duty to do,) to avail yourselves of the present occasion, to join in that solemn rite of our Church, which we are

about to celebrate. To partake once more of that Sacrament, which our Saviour himself hath instituted, as a perpetual memorial of his death ; and to renew to him our grateful sense of that his inestimable sacrifice. So shall we best express our conviction that his first advent was indeed nothing less than the completion of that astonishing series of predictions, which, for four thousand years, prepared the world for that awful display of Divine power. So shall we afford some proof that the Gospel of Christ has not been preached in vain to us, but has kindled in our hearts some warm affection for its gracious Author. So, finally, shall we impress upon our minds that salutary fear of a judgment to come, which will produce in us sincere repentance of our past sins, firm resolutions of a future amendment,—and, above all, that genuine and practical piety, in which alone consists that *holiness, without which*, we are assured, that *none shall see the Lord*.

## SERMON II.

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HEBREWS ix. 27, 28.

*As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

HAVING in my last Discourse endeavoured to draw your attention to some of the principal points which the Scriptures disclose to us, respecting the first advent of our blessed Lord, I am now to enter into the consideration of what they teach us with regard to his second coming, to pronounce final judgment upon the whole race of mankind. These two stupendous events are so inseparably connected, that if the history of the one be true, the other must necessarily be true also. If Christ were really what he claimed to be, the Messiah,—the Son of God,—his promise to come again, to fix the eternal fate of every

individual, will infallibly be accomplished. Awful and almost oppressive to our faculties as it is to dwell upon *this*, the sublimest of all the mysteries of revelation, the contrary supposition, that no such event will ever take place, is, perhaps, still more difficult to be admitted by our understandings. That our being should utterly terminate with this world, is totally irreconcilable with every just notion which we can form of human affairs—or of the essential attributes of God. They both require a future state of retribution to make them intelligible to our minds. That the wickedness and misery which every where abound in this world should remain for ever unredressed, is contrary to every thing which either reason or revelation teaches us, with respect to the Almighty. When I speak of the misery which is so prevalent in the earth, I am not alluding to the great and palpable inequality in the *conditions* of men in this life: were that all, I do not think it would afford much argument for the expectation of another; nor is that the ground upon which the Gospel authorizes us to expect it. In considering human existence with reference to its great Author, the question is not

under what *external circumstances* it is passed, but what it is in itself, whether it be happy or otherwise. Now the Almighty has evidently limited happiness to no condition of life. It is attainable, and is frequently attained, as effectually in one rank of society as in another. They who are in the lowest may, and do, often possess it,—the highest *can* do more. It is true that it is liable always to many and grievous interruptions—but these operate equally, though by ways the most diversified, upon all descriptions of persons; none are exempt from them. The means of happiness are indeed as various, as the various conditions of mankind: but the end is the same. And provided *that* be obtained, none would have a right, and few persons would have the disposition to complain, were their present existence all that the Almighty had designed for them. But such is the condition of humanity, that there are few indeed, in whatever situation they may be placed, who are not visited by some of the numerous and serious calamities to which it is exposed. We can form even in this world clear conceptions of a degree of felicity which seems perpetually courting, and as constantly eluding our

grasp. And this, surely, is of itself no slight indication, that happiness of a higher and more permanent nature than any which we at present enjoy, is reserved for us hereafter.

But still, upon this ground *only* we could build our hopes of a future life with little confidence. If God has so constituted us, that happiness, so far as it depends upon the faculties which he has given us to obtain it, is very equally and very liberally distributed; and that life, upon the whole, is more desirable than non-existence, (which will not, I apprehend, be disputed)—we could have no possible pretence to complain of the lot which he had cast for us, were *the whole* of it that being of which we are now in possession. But this is but a small part of what he has done for us: He has not only made us to be sensible of happiness or the want of it—but he has also made us rational creatures, with an absolute liberty of action; and, therefore, strictly and properly accountable for our conduct. And in this state, our virtues or our vices not only affect very materially the question of our present happiness or misery, but lay a foundation of great solidity, for the expectation of another state of existence after

death. For nothing, I apprehend, can less admit of dispute, than that virtue is, in this world, very frequently, either totally or very inadequately rewarded ; and that vice, on the other hand, is as frequently wholly unpunished. These are facts of which all history is full ; and they consist, indeed, almost with every man's personal observation.

That the best of human beings do frequently pass their whole lives in suffering of various kinds ; and that guilt of the most atrocious description, remains frequently undetected and unpunished—whilst the criminal enjoys external prosperity, not perhaps always much impaired even by the pangs of conscience, can admit of no doubt. And this has been the foundation of all those vague and absurd notions of a future state, which have prevailed in the world, before the Christian era, and since, wherever Christianity has not yet penetrated. And such is our total inability to fathom of ourselves the designs of Providence upon this subject, that but for the revelation of the Gospel, we should never have been able to advance the matter beyond probable conjecture. True, (we should have said) such an hypothesis will alone solve to our



minds the apparent difficulties of the present system of things. But there may be other ways totally unknown to us, of accounting for and explaining these difficulties ; and a future state, resting only upon hypothesis, would be deficient in one of its main ends. It would want that degree of *certainty* and *assurance*, which is requisite to make it an efficient motive to virtue ; and, accordingly, we do *not* find that it had any material influence upon the lives of the pagan world.

But its promulgation by Divine authority, in the person of our Saviour, has been of a very different character. If it has not operated so powerfully and extensively as we might naturally have expected, still there can be no doubt that it has produced the most important effects upon the lives of millions who have adopted it, as an article of their Christian creed ; and *that* because it has been taught in a manner to enable them to place the firmest reliance upon its truth.

The two principal points which we have now to consider, are both contained in the text: First—The fact, that after death we shall receive judgment ; which implies the necessity of our re-existence for that purpose. And

secondly, the manner of our receiving that judgment ;—namely, by Christ's re-appearance to pronounce it. With respect to the first point, it will be unnecessary to quote, at present, in confirmation of the doctrine of the text, our Saviour's express words upon that subject, as I shall have occasion to cite them hereafter. But there is *one* circumstance connected with it, which it is of importance to notice :—We are assured, that our future judgment shall take place at *the end of the world*. Now, were the world to be *eternal*; there can be no doubt that *that* would be no impediment to every man's appearing *before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive the things done in his body, whether they be good or bad*. For any thing that we could know independent of revelation, those who die might receive judgment, though *all things should continue here as they were from the beginning of the Creation*.

It may be a question, therefore, with some persons, whether the introduction of this circumstance, of the termination of the world, does or does not add probability to the doctrine itself. And I have no difficulty in saying, that in my opinion it does considerably

strengthen its probability. Carrying our thoughts backward, we become as perfectly convinced as we can be of any thing, that there must have been a time when every thing that at present exists, had a beginning, different from that to which we are now accustomed. The seed now becomes a plant, and again the plant produces seed, and so on in constant succession ; but whence originally the seed or the plant ? one or the other of them must have proceeded from a power extrinsical to themselves. Such, at least, is the inevitable conclusion to which our minds must come when we reflect upon the matter, even with regard to mere vegetable existence.— And when we come to consider the phenomena of animal and intellectual life, this conclusion is still more irresistibly forced upon us.

Again, every thing which we collect from history, ancient or modern, the known rise of civilized states, or the present condition of barbarous countries, the observations of naturalists respecting the formation of the earth, and the changes which it appears to have undergone—all concur to convince us that its origin has been comparatively of recent date ; probably, not longer than that assigned to it

by our Scriptural chronology. It is true that there are in the east traditions, which claim for it a much longer duration ; but though we cannot allow the authority of any of these to be comparable with that of the Old Testament, still, were we to grant them, for the sake of argument, the utmost latitude, they would not affect our conclusion, that the world *has* had a *beginning* ; and if so, the probability is, that it will also have an end.— If it has not been eternal *a parte ante*, there can be no reason why it should be so *a parte post*. And, therefore, the doctrine of Scripture respecting the end of the world, is confirmed both by the results of our observation and the deductions of our reason.

But there is a further question, of considerable interest, as to what we are taught by the New Testament, with regard to the *period* when the end of the world shall take place. There are a few passages of great, perhaps of insuperable difficulty, upon this subject ; for it is sometimes easier to determine with certainty what *cannot* be the sense of Scripture, than to say, positively, *what it is*. It is sufficient for us, if we can vindicate its general truth and consistency, upon all great and

material points ; though we should be obliged to confess, that there still remain in it some *things hard to be understood*. But between this, and imputing to it doctrines which it does *not* contain, for the sake of discrediting its authority, there is a wide interval.

A late learned and eloquent historian, to whom I had occasion to refer in my last discourse, and who has, I fear, done much harm to Christianity by the strong light in which he has placed every thing, which he regarded as unfavourable to it—has not scrupled to say, that “in the primitive Church the influence of truth was very powerfully strengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deserve respect for its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found agreeable to experience. It was *universally* believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event (he affirms,) had been predicted by the Apostles ; the tradition of it was preserved by their earliest Disciples, and those who understood, in their literal sense, the discourses of Christ himself, were obliged to expect the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation

was totally extinguished, which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, and which might still be witness of the calamities of the Jews under Vespasian or Hadrian<sup>1</sup>.”

It is remarkable, that profuse as he is in general of authorities, he has not referred to a single one in proof of his assertion, that this opinion *was universally* entertained in the primitive Church. He has, indeed, intimated in a note, that it “was countenanced by the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, and by the 1st Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.”—That such a notion, however it originated, did prevail to *some* extent, is more than probable, from St. Paul’s 2nd Epistle to that same Church. And if it had, in fact, been taught either by our Saviour or himself, it would have been a difficulty in the way of our religion not easily to be removed. But if it can be shewn that no such doctrine was maintained, either by Christ or his Apostles, but, on the contrary, that it was expressly denied by them, Christianity will be effectually delivered from this imputation, and our faith

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, c. 15.

will be in no degree affected by this insidious attempt to shake it.

With respect to the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of St. Mark and St. Luke, it is quite clear that, in their primary and literal sense, they relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, the final dispersion of the Jews, and their ceasing to exist as a nation, until the period, when it is determined in the counsels of God, that they shall renounce their religious errors, perceive the truth of Christianity, embrace it, and be restored to his favor. Of all the arguments that support our religion, there is not, perhaps, one more powerful than this remarkable prediction of our Saviour, containing (as it does) so many minute particulars of an event which was at the time, when he delivered it, wholly out of all ordinary calculation, and beyond the reach even of the deepest political sagacity; but which was, nevertheless, most exactly and wonderfully fulfilled. Except it could be proved that it never *was* delivered, but was forged after the event took place, we must look upon it as an absolute proof of the Divine power of him from whom it pro-

ceeded. And as it does not appear that amongst the early objections to the truth of Christianity, this was one, it is now much too late to expect that it can be assailed with success on this side. In the course of our Lord's observations upon this subject, his language is occasionally figurative in the highest degree, insomuch that his expressions are frequently equally applicable to the approaching catastrophe of the Jews, or to the remote consummation of all things: the former of which may well be regarded as a type or emblem of the latter: for to this day nothing has occurred in the history of the world that can be compared with the multiplied horrors which the Jews sustained in the siege, and at the capture of Jerusalem. It is evident that all our Saviour's expressions, which speak of something as *at hand*, and which declare that that *generation should not pass till it was fulfilled*, must be limited to that dreadful event: whilst others, which refer to an uncertain period, to *that day and hour which no man knoweth, nor the angels in heaven, but the Father only*, may be understood either with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, or to the day of Judgment.—



And this seems sufficient to prove, that the opinion that the end of the world was at hand, cannot fairly be deduced from our Lord's discourse in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, and I am not aware that there is any thing else which fell from him, from which it could with any justice be inferred.

With respect to the first Epistle to the Thesalonians, the passage alluded to no doubt is this : *for this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

That the plain and natural import of this passage would lead us to conclude, that St. Paul thought the day of judgment was at hand, and would even happen in his own lifetime, cannot be denied. But it is equally certain, that such an opinion would be at direct variance with his declarations in several

of his other epistles : and common candour requires, that we should put that construction upon his words which will make him most consistent with himself. Now, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks of his *own* expectation of a resurrection from the dead : *Knowing that he that raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.* And in the same manner to the Philippians : *If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.* And in his second Epistle to Timothy, he intimates, that his own death was certain, and even approaching : *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

I think, therefore, that we may very safely adopt that explanation of this difficult passage, which has been very generally admitted by the commentators, though it certainly differs from its plain and obvious meaning. That by

the phrase, *we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord*, St. Paul must be understood as not speaking literally of himself, and those whom he was addressing, but of Christians generally, and referring to such of them as should be alive at the coming of the Lord. That such was his meaning, however loosely he may have expressed it, is more than probable, by what he immediately adds respecting the uncertainty of the period when that event should happen: *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.* And that he had expressed himself upon this point, in this Epistle, so as to be misunderstood at least by some of the Thessalonians, is rendered quite evident by what he says to them in his second Epistle: *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.* Such being his decided opinion, and it being easy to shew (did time permit it) that

it exactly accorded with that of the other Apostles, we can by no means assent to the assertion, that the near approach of the end of the world had been predicted by either of them. Whether, when the historian speaks of that event as being one and the same thing as the kingdom of heaven, we are to ascribe it to negligence, or to intentional misrepresentation, I know not. Certain it is, that in general they have no such identity of signification; the latter expression usually denoting only the preaching of the Gospel, and the establishing its dominion in the hearts of men. Upon the whole, we may conclude, that to whatever extent this erroneous opinion may have been entertained by the early Christians; and however incautiously it may have been attributed to the Apostles by some distinguished<sup>1</sup> believers, or artfully employed by infidels to discredit Christianity; neither our Saviour, nor his Apostles, are justly chargeable with it: and, consequently, that our faith should in no degree be shaken upon this ground.

But, whatever may have been thought formerly of a future judgment, and of the pe-

<sup>1</sup> Macknight's Preface to 2 Thessalonians.

riod when it shall take place, it is above all things incumbent upon us to be thoroughly convinced of it, and to regulate our lives by that conviction. The general belief of it, if it be sincere and well founded, is abundantly sufficient for this purpose. But it will probably be much confirmed, by examining more particularly, what the Scriptures teach respecting it, as connected with the second advent of our Saviour; in which it will appear, that there is no inconsistency between the doctrine of Christ and that of his Apostles upon this subject. But this, with the discussion of some collateral points, will furnish matter for future consideration, and will prepare us for the celebration of the nativity of him who has been the Author, and will be the Finisher of all these things.

Let us, for the present, rest with this reflection, that if a future judgment were a matter which could be shewn only to be in some degree probable, how lamentably weak we must appear, even in our own eyes, if we do not suffer it to have the same influence upon our conduct, which other probable events have in our worldly transactions; and *that* in proportion to the infinitely greater importance

of the one than the other. But since no man can pretend to prove that it is *not certain*, (for upon Scriptural grounds it *is* certain, and to disprove *them* seems impossible,) we ought, in common prudence, to act as if it were unquestionable. For if, after all, it were an error, it is not only a harmless error, but a highly beneficial one. Even upon *that* supposition, such and so many are the blessings conferred upon us by our religion, of which this doctrine is a fundamental article, regarded only in a temporal point of view, that every wise and good man must be ready to ask with Dr. Paley, "who would not wish his son to be a Christian?" The end of all such discussions then as these, is to add strength to our faith, and to advance probability towards certainty; to smooth difficulties, and to reconcile apparent incongruities. So that the study of the Scriptures may not terminate in barren and unprofitable speculations, but may become an efficient principle of action; and by improving our moral nature to the utmost in this life, may enable us, after death, to meet the judgment, in humble but earnest expectation of happiness and immortality in the world to come.

## SERMON III.

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HEBREWS ix. 28.

*Unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.*

HAVING, in two former discourses, treated of the first advent of our Saviour, and of its main object, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, his own express declarations, and the general tenor of Scripture, namely, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and having entered *generally* into the consideration of his second coming to judge the world; there remains only to be examined what the Scriptures reveal to us more particularly concerning that awful event, and to conclude with such reflections as the whole subject will naturally suggest.

But first, it will be expedient to premise a few words in explanation of the terms of the text, *unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time unto salvation.* It is

observable, that *believers only* seem to be mentioned here ; and of them only such as shall be *saved*. But it must, nevertheless, be understood, that all persons, without exception, will be the objects of this second advent : because the Scripture speaks of no other real future advent, than that when our Saviour will *reward every man according to his works*. It is also said, that he will appear *without sin*. It is not, perhaps, easy to determine, why these words were inserted by the apostle. At our Lord's *first* coming, when he took our nature upon him, we are told that *he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*. And it seems quite unnecessary to say, that when he shall come in his divine nature only, it would be with that qualification. The best, if not the only explanation of it, that I have met with, is this ; that the word here translated sin, signifies also a sin-offering ; and that the apostle's meaning, therefore, is, that at our Saviour's next appearance, it will be without making another sin-offering of himself : according to his declaration in the next chapter, that, *if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*.



It might be necessary to impress this circumstance upon the converted Jews, whose minds were so accustomed to the doctrine of sacrifice for sins, and who can hardly be supposed, at that time, to have formed correct ideas of the nature of the second advent of our Saviour.

As the language of Jesus upon this topic is very similar to that of the prophet Daniel, we can hardly err in supposing it to have been predicted by the latter in this passage: *I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.* Our Lord seems evidently to have alluded to this upon several occasions. In the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, he says, *The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works.* But he adds, *there be some standing here,*

*which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom :* upon which I shall have to observe hereafter. His more explicit declaration of his future coming to judgment, without any reference to the then existing generation, is contained in the twenty-fifth chapter of the same Evangelist. *When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ; and before him shall be gathered all nations ; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.* And after describing the grounds of his judgment to be the respective good or evil conduct of these two great divisions of mankind, he concludes, that the one *shall go into everlasting punishment, but the other into life eternal.*

That, by his second coming, must be understood his actual re-appearance upon earth, seems clear from his own words, as reported by St. John : *I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also :* which accords with that well-known prediction of Job, which I think it is impossible to



understand (as Bp. Warburton does<sup>1</sup>) to refer only to his expectation of a temporal deliverance : *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand, at the latter day, upon the earth ; and though, after my skin, worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.* To these texts, I will only add the declaration of the two angels, at the time of our Saviour's ascension, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles ; *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven.* The clear doctrine of Scripture I take, therefore, to be this, that our Saviour will certainly appear upon earth a second time ; but that the period of that event is left wholly uncertain : according to his own cautionary injunction, *Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

But how are we to reconcile this with the passage already quoted, where he speaks of his coming, whilst some who heard him were still living ; and many others of a similar kind ? Such as this of St. Paul to the Philip-

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation of Moses, vol. v. p. 371.

prians; *Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand.* And the same Apostle to the Hebrews: *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* The answer to this apparent difficulty is this, that the Scriptures speak of the future coming of Christ in no less than four different senses<sup>1</sup>: three of them figurative, but the fourth a real personal appearance. That more than one thing, or one time, may be intended by the phrase, the day of the Son of Man, is evident from his own words, in St. Luke's Gospel: *And he said unto the disciples, the days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.* The principal event which is described as the coming of the Lord, or the day of the Lord, and not referring to the day of judgment, is that which we have already had occasion to notice, the destruction of Jerusalem. This our Lord had unequivocally

<sup>1</sup> Macknight's Preface to 2 Thessalonians.

declared would happen before the then generation should be totally extinct ; and accordingly it did so happen. But in speaking of the end of the world, and the final judgment, he employed the same or very similar terms ; but with respect to the period of its arrival, he neither affirmed that it was near at hand, nor remote : but merely that it was wholly uncertain. Speaking in his human capacity, he declared that he himself *knew it not, nor even the angels in heaven, but his Father only* ; and he compared it to the coming of a *thief in the night*. Now this representation may be said to be agreeable to experience, and to be a proof, to a certain extent, of the truth of his pretensions. Had he been a mere enthusiast, and had undertaken to affirm any thing with respect to this event, the probability is, that he would have hazarded something positive with regard to the time when it would happen ; yet he has not done so. But having left it in complete uncertainty, there has consequently been no period, from that time to the present, when *any* man could confidently say, that it was nigh at hand or far off : nor any, when *every* man has not been at liberty, from the circumstances of the world, to con-

*jecture* either that it was approaching, or was still at a great distance. Regarding the Apostles, therefore, only as ordinary men, there would have been nothing remarkable, had they ventured to express their opinions upon it either one way or the other. But looking upon them either as inspired, or as strictly adhering to the doctrines of their Divine Master, we should certainly expect them to be free from error upon this, as upon every other subject of which they treat ; and accordingly we shall find that they followed the example of our Lord with great precision in this particular : speaking always *positively* of the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, but *doubtfully* as to the period of the day of judgment : and adopting the very simile which Jesus had employed, by comparing its arrival to that *of a thief in the night*. The passages, therefore, which I have already quoted from the Epistle to the Philippians, and from that to the Hebrews, *the Lord is at hand, and ye see the day approaching*, and some others, *may*, and, therefore, *ought*, to be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, and not to the day of judgment.

But there are some texts of this kind which

admit of still further explanation. It is known that the Jewish doctors divided the duration of the world into three ages: the age before the law, that under the law, and that under the Messiah<sup>1</sup>; and the Apostles knew that the age under the law was to end when that under the Messiah began. Now this will satisfactorily explain some of those expressions, from which they have erroneously been thought to have asserted, that the end of the world was at hand. Such as this to the Corinthians: *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* That is literally the ends of the ages, or the last age. The Apostle here speaks of something not merely as approaching, but as having actually arrived. And it is, therefore, quite impossible that he could be alluding, either to the destruction of Jerusalem, or to the day of judgment; and it shews how easily we may mistake his meaning if we do not advert to the circumstances in which he was placed, and to the ideas with which he was familiar.

<sup>1</sup> See Whitby, on 1 Cor. x. 11.

There are two other events described as the coming of our Lord, which are supposed to be different from either of those which we have been considering, but which I would not insist upon much, on account of the obscurity in which they are involved ; farther than to shew, that the phrase, as used by the Apostles, is undoubtedly one of very various signification.—The first of these is his coming to destroy *the man of sin*<sup>1</sup> ; whomever may be intended by that description. Him, *whom* (says St. Paul to the Thessalonians) *the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*. What is meant here, is still a matter of inquiry and conjecture ; and with respect to the period when it shall take place, nothing is affirmed either one way or the other. In the remaining instance of the use of this expression, the Apostle appears to denote by it, the day<sup>2</sup> of the death of each individual Christian. In the following, and some other texts, this has been supposed to be his meaning: *And I pray*

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Newton, Macknight, and others, understand it of the Popes ; Whitby, and others, of the Jewish nation.

<sup>2</sup> Macknight's Preface to 2 Thessalonians.



*God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* That the day of the death of every man may justly be considered, as to him, to be the day of the second coming of our Saviour, or the day of judgment, is extremely evident. All the interval, be it long or short, can be nothing with regard to him. With it his period of probation expires, and such as he is at that moment, such he must appear at the judgment-seat of Christ. In this sense the language of St. Paul is strictly correct : *For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.* And that of St. James : *Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts : for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh ; behold, the Judge standeth before the door.* Could this consideration operate upon our minds at all times, with half the force which it probably does upon most men, when their dissolution approaches, little more would be necessary to induce us to lead such lives as would disarm death of its sting, and make us anticipate the second advent of our Lord, with feelings very different from those of terror and dismay.

This is the only *real coming* of our Lord, of

which the Scriptures speak, as to take place hereafter, according to his own declaration before referred to: *The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works.* This coming will be distinguished from his first appearance upon earth, by the dignity with which he will then be invested, as contrasted with his former humility. His Godhead will no longer be concealed under the veil of humanity: but (however impossible it is for us at present to form any conceptions of it,) will be revealed in all its brightness and glory; and his office will then be as different from his former one, as his appearance will be more illustrious. For instead of instructing us in righteousness, and making atonement for our sins, he will have to enquire whether we have obeyed his instructions; and, if not, to pronounce judgment upon us, according to our deserts. This is that coming of which his Apostles could not have affirmed any thing with regard to the time when it would happen: because he had not only given them no information upon that point, but had expressly declared (speaking in his human nature) his own ignorance with

respect to it. And it does seem very extraordinary, therefore, that such a doctrine should have been imputed to them, not only by infidels, but even by some sincere and eminent believers<sup>1</sup>. For if they had really maintained it, it would be very difficult to reconcile it, either with their character of inspired men, or with that of faithful disciples of their Lord. And it is, therefore, of the last importance to vindicate them in this matter, and to shew (as I have endeavoured to do,) that their language admits of a different and a more just interpretation. That such an opinion has been holden in every age of the Church, and is even at present maintained by some persons, cannot be denied. But this no more affects the truth of Christianity, than any other erroneous notion that has been engrafted upon it; but its being taught by our Lord himself, or his Apostles, would have been a very different matter. It would not, indeed, invalidate any of the clear proofs which we possess of their Divine authority; but it would be a serious difficulty in our way, and might, in some degree, weaken our faith in

<sup>1</sup> Macknight's Preface, as before.

their doctrine. We cannot, therefore, be too fully convinced, that however it originated, it cannot be justly ascribed to them, but on the contrary, that it was denied by them in the most positive terms.

In my last discourse I quoted a passage from St. Paul to the Thessalonians, in which he evidently alludes to such an opinion as then prevalent, but totally disclaims it as having proceeded from him. St. Peter appears also to have been aware of it, and of the mischievous use which would be made of it, and repels it accordingly. *Knowing this, (says he) that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* “Words which (says Paley<sup>1</sup>) confound and astonish human understanding, yet are strictly and metaphysically true;” but which writers<sup>2</sup> of another descrip-

<sup>1</sup> In his Sermon on Hebrews xiii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Collins on the Grounds of the Christian Religion, p. 256.

tion have found it much easier to meet with a sneer than an argument. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness : but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* He then goes on to give a terrific and sublime description of the day of judgment, and concludes by referring to St. Paul's Epistles, in which he says, speaking of these things : *there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.* It would be difficult after this, to contend that St. Peter thought the end of the world was at hand, and would happen in his own life-time.

I have already commented upon the few expressions which occur in St. James's Epistle upon this subject, and shewn that they admit or require a different interpretation ; and it appears from his own words, in the Acts of the Apostles, that he expected *the residue of men, and all the Gentiles, to be converted to Christianity* ; and, consequently, he cannot be supposed, when he says, *the coming of the Lord draweth nigh*, to refer to Christ's

second advent, except he could also expect that those great events would be accomplished within a very short space of time.— A similar observation may be applied to St. John; he speaks with complete uncertainty respecting the second advent, and its precise consequences: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like unto him, for we shall see him as he is.* And without pretending to determine what are the events foretold, in his mysterious book of Revelation, it is sufficient to say, that no one imagines they have even yet received their full completion; and, consequently, he must be acquitted of having inculcated the erroneous doctrine in question. If, therefore, it has been proved, that neither our Saviour nor any of his Apostles taught it, to what extent it might have been believed in the primitive Church, even if it could be ascertained, is a matter of little moment; but that *we ourselves* should entertain sound and rational views with respect to it, and regulate our lives accordingly, is undoubtedly an object of the highest importance.

It is not its proximity or remoteness, but its absolute certainty ; and *that* at no very distant period for any who are now living, that should dispose us to bear constantly in mind our Lord's solemn injunction : *Take ye heed, watch and pray ; for ye know not when the time is.* Let us be vigilant over our thoughts and words, our opinions and our actions. And because we must be sensible how imperfectly, from the distractions of the world, and our inevitable attention to its concerns, we discharge these important duties ; and, consequently, how liable we are to incur both the temporal and eternal judgments of God : let us *pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of Man.* Nor let us perplex ourselves with endeavouring to comprehend more than is necessary, with respect to the proceedings of that awful tribunal. These are conveyed to us in very general, and sometimes in highly figurative terms ; inso-much, that we might incautiously conclude, that all mankind will be divided but into two classes—the good and the bad ; of which the portion of the one will be eternal happiness, and of the other eternal misery. But as no-

thing can be more evident, than that *the degrees* both of virtue and vice, in different men, are almost infinitely varied; and that their circumstances of extenuation or aggravation are similarly diversified, we cannot but hesitate at coming to such a conclusion. It is, therefore, both important and consolatory for us to remember, that our Saviour himself has assured us, that he will *reward every man according to his works*; and that in his *Father's house there are many mansions*.— From these expressions we are surely warranted in believing, that as the perfect wisdom and justice of the Almighty must dispose him to apportion the reward or punishment of every man according to his particular case; so his boundless power will enable him to perform it with an exactness of which we can hardly form any conception. And this is sufficient to clear up at once all the irregularities and difficulties of the present system of things. For whilst the Gospel holds out every inducement to the greater part of mankind, to cultivate those humble virtues, which it is competent for them to practise; it removes from them every discouragement, by teaching them, that from those to whom little has been



granted, little also will be required ; and it shews why it was peculiarly preached “ to the poor :” namely, to reconcile them to their present condition, by instructing them that it depends only upon themselves to obtain, in a future life, a full compensation for all the disadvantages of their lot in the present.

But to the less numerous, yet still considerable portion of mankind, who are distinguished by superior endowments of fortune, of talents, or of power, it presents a very different, but equally important lesson. It calls upon them to consider frequently and seriously, why, and to what end, they have received in their *lifetime good things* ; whilst so many of their brethren have received *evil things only*. It reminds them forcibly that they are here only as stewards, and that they must hereafter *give an account of their stewardship*. That the account demanded of them will be rigorous, but just ; and that though they *may* hope for mercy to their errors, they *must not* look for impunity to their crimes. That if they have abused the talents entrusted to them, (of whatever kind they may have been) by making them subservient to their evil passions, they can expect nothing but the severest punish-

ment. That if they have neglected to improve them, by making them instrumental to the cultivation of their own virtues, and the welfare of their fellow-creatures, they must be answerable for such neglect to a Lord who will visit, with marked severity, the slothful and unprofitable servant; but will reward, with proportioned munificence, him who shall have been found good and faithful. If, then, we cannot forego the indulgence of any of those vices which our religion forbids, we must be prepared to encounter that dreadful doom, which it expressly denounces against such wretched folly and guilt. If we can content ourselves with merely avoiding positive wickedness, without rising to the performance of any active virtues, with leading lives burthensome to ourselves, useless to the community, unpleasing to God, we *may* possibly meet with a fate short of intolerable misery, but hopeless of joy and felicity. But if we are capable of higher views—if we are resolved to be Christians, not in *name only*, but in sincerity of faith, and in practical holiness, *adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*,—we may look forward to his second advent with the well-founded

expectation of receiving from him an *inheritance, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away,—a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

## SERMON IV.

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MATTHEW xxiv. 42.

*Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

TOWARDS the conclusion of my last discourse, I called your attention to this solemn injunction of our blessed Lord, with which he terminated his prophetic description of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. There are some parts of it of so sublime and awful a character, that they seem (as I had before occasion to observe) equally, if not more applicable, to his own final advent to judge the world, than to that great and calamitous event. And it is probable that he intended to represent the one as a type or emblem of the other. Considered with reference to the predicted punishment inflicted upon the Jews, it has two points which particularly deserve

our attention : First, the proof which it furnishes of our Saviour's preternatural power of foretelling future events, of which this is one of the most unequivocal instances to be found in Holy Writ. It does not, indeed, establish that he was himself divine, because the same power had been confided to other prophets, for whom no such character can be claimed. But it proves incontestably, that he was divinely commissioned and instructed, and consequently that we may, and *must* rely implicitly, upon the truth of all his declarations ; even those which go to establish his proper divinity and identity with his Father.— Secondly, we cannot but regard it as a solemn warning, both to individuals and nations, of the dreadful *temporal* judgments which they may draw down upon themselves, by obstinate infidelity or unrepented guilt. But the catastrophe of the Jewish nation having long since been accomplished, our most profitable way of considering the text, and other similar passages of Scripture, will be by interpreting it with reference to the day of judgment, and to all that is revealed to us upon that tremendous subject.

And, first, it is an explicit declaration to our

Lord's disciples of their ignorance, and consequently, to us, of our own, of the period when that dreadful event will take place. Of this, not only were they, and are we, totally uninformed, but our Lord had expressly asserted before, that even he himself (speaking of course in his human capacity,) knew it not : *but of that day and hour knoweth no man ; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* But, notwithstanding this uncertainty as to the precise period of its arrival, there prevailed (as we have already seen) a very general opinion, in the apostolic age, amongst the Christians, that it was not *even then* far distant ; nor has this opinion been without its adherents, more or less numerous, in every subsequent age of the Church ; nor can it be denied that several passages of Scripture may be produced, which appear to give it countenance. It is not my intention to go over any of these again, for the purpose of shewing that they will admit of another interpretation ; particularly that they *may* be referred to the destruction of Jerusalem : because, were that doubtful, I should agree with a very able modern com-

mentator<sup>1</sup>, that it is the better course to take the Scriptures in their plain and obvious sense, even though we should sometimes be obliged to confess that we do not perfectly comprehend them, than to endeavour by any forced construction, to make them bend to our own notions, of what is reasonable or probable. Not but that what is most rational and intelligible in religion, and most agreeable to the facts and phenomena of human life, is not the most valuable and important part of it—because it is *that* of the truth, of which we must necessarily have the firmest conviction; and *that* which must most materially affect our conduct in *this* life, and our salvation in the *next*; but that it is certain, that there is much in the Scriptures, the meaning of which at present lies beyond our reach, and which probably future and distant events *only* will be able clearly to develope. Nor is this at all wonderful, or any obstacle to our reliance upon that which is clear, and easily applicable to the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed. If our Saviour could prove to

<sup>1</sup> Macknight on the Epistles, vol. I. p. 40.

the Jews that they understood not their own Scriptures, which they justly held in such deep reverence, and studied with such intense diligence : if we are assured that the meaning of his own sayings was frequently concealed even from his disciples ; if St. Peter has declared, that in all St. Paul's Epistles there were *some things hard to be understood*, particularly on this topic of the day of judgment : nay, if we must needs confess, that in every thing with which we are conversant, the faculties of our minds, or the structure of our bodies, in all nature, animate or inanimate, there is much which defies our utmost sagacity to comprehend, or rather very little which we *do* perfectly understand—surely, it can be matter of no surprise to us, that in reflecting upon the mysteries of revelation, *the deep things of God*, (as the Apostle calls them) our minds should frequently be lost and confounded, in endeavouring to penetrate their obscurity, or to reach their sublimity. Without, therefore, attempting to speculate upon the remoteness or proximity of the day of judgment, of which abundant experience has long since demonstrated the folly and presumption : I shall consider the text entirely in a practical



point of view, and draw such inferences from it as should naturally produce the most salutary effects upon our conduct.

It is, in fact, as to us, an exhortation to vigilance, with respect to our thoughts, principles, and actions, founded upon the absolute ignorance in which we live, of the period when our present existence will terminate; and of the certainty that we shall hereafter be strictly responsible for those things which will no longer be capable of change or amendment. The hour in which we shall cease to breathe, and that in which our Lord shall come, being, as to us, precisely the same thing.

It is a powerful argument in favour of the truth of our holy religion, that its doctrines, when rightly understood, will be found to harmonize with the established order of things; *that* order I mean which is established by Divine Providence, and *not* that which depends upon merely human and variable institutions; and the soundness of any doctrines which cannot be reconciled with the former, may justly be regarded with great suspicion. Now, the complete uncertainty of the duration of human life, is a fact which admits not of the slightest question. Almost every man's

experience will supply him with numerous instances of its most unexpected termination, and of its equally remarkable prolongation ; insomuch, that youth itself affords no ground for confidence in its continuance, nor has age any reason to dread its sudden conclusion.— If we apply this as a test to any of the great practical doctrines of our religion, we shall find that it will contribute powerfully to their support ; and above all, it will shew the necessity for that vigilance which is so emphatically enjoined by the text. That God has created us, neither for perfect happiness nor for extreme misery, but for that *mixed state*, in which the good generally so far exceeds the evil, as to attach us sufficiently to life for all the purposes of our present existence ; yet, does not so far predominate as to prevent us from quitting it with fortitude, in sure expectation of another, is a doctrine that pervades the whole of the Scriptures, and is agreeable to our constant experience. But could this be true, if our lives consisted of any known definite period, whether long or short ? Could such a state of things be compatible with any thing like happiness, or at least with that degree of it, which is commonly attainable by

us? Certainly it could not. The knowledge of the day of our death, at whatever period, would of itself be sufficient to embitter every hour of our existence. This idea would always be present in our minds, and exercise not a salutary, but a depressing and debilitating influence over our thoughts and actions. For although this period, as we advance in years, gradually approaches to certainty, yet, generally speaking, it seldom attains it, at least but for a very short time before its actual arrival; and the having passed our lives in a constant uncertainty in this respect, habituates the mind to a state of indifference on the subject, which must conduce greatly to our comfort. But even were this *otherwise* with respect to *ourselves*,—could the knowledge of the allotted length of our days operate so beneficially upon our conduct, as to *promote* rather than to *impede* our happiness—what *must* be its effect upon *others*—upon those with whom we are connected by the ties of blood or affection? Must it not greatly impair the felicity of the connubial state, and aggravate the sorrows of the separation of parents and children? Not to be able to look upon those whom we love, without a melan-

choly anticipation of the precise moment, when we must part with them for ever, at least in this world, must be distressing in the highest degree. That, upon the whole, it would sensibly diminish the enjoyment of human life, can admit of no doubt; and, therefore, we cannot but conclude that Providence, in withholding this knowledge from us, has consulted our *good* only, so far as this life is concerned. But if it be instrumental to our happiness, it must be no less so to our virtue: for the latter is the only real foundation of the former. If many persons will, nevertheless, persist in seeking it, through the medium of their vices, well knowing the tendency which most of them have to shorten their existence, what bounds would they set to the gratification of their passions, were all apprehensions of this sort banished from their minds? Where would the sensualist or the profligate stop, if they were secure of present impunity for all their transgressions? Indeed, in this point of view, a fixed term of life seems not only undesirable, but, humanly speaking, impossible.

Another leading doctrine of our religion, inculcates the necessity for that repentance,

which consists not merely in sorrow for our sins, however sincere or violent, nor even in firm resolutions of amendment, if they are productive of no good results,—but of that renewal of mind and heart, and conformity to the revealed will of God, which forms the basis of the true Christian character. Now to this doctrine it is obvious, that our ignorance how long we have to live, should naturally afford the strongest support. It should perpetually urge us to do *that* which *must* be done, and to be effectual, cannot be done too soon. But if with the full knowledge of the instability of human life, this indispensable work is so frequently deferred from time to time, till in the end, perhaps, it is altogether omitted, or very inadequately performed; how much would this great evil be increased, if a distant opportunity for it could be securely reckoned upon? And if, under the present circumstances, the efficacy of a late repentance is justly accounted most hazardous, would it not, when so deliberately and so presumptuously postponed, be entirely unavailing? It is true that the Gospel does not absolutely discourage the performance of this duty, however late it be undertaken, but it enjoins us to

*bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, which evidently cannot be accomplished if it is deferred till the last moments of our existence. Though it is not for us, therefore, to presume to set limits to the mercy of God, yet, we may safely say, that a more dangerous doctrine cannot be advanced than that which speaks confidently of the salvation of great sinners, founded upon nothing but the tardy contrition of a few days or hours, produced, perhaps, only by the fear of approaching dissolution. This sort of conduct, which is too frequently exhibited in the cases of condemned criminals, is not more erroneous upon religious principles, than it is unwise in a moral and political point of view. For it is to reverse one of the great ends of punishment, which is to prevent crime by the terror of its consequences, of which the principal should be, that *future judgment* to be expected in another life. But if this is not only taken away, but a confident hope is excited of future reward, resting upon no solid and rational ground whatever, the most serious injury is inflicted upon society—the unhappy individual is too probably deceived—and others are easily led to the commission of offences, which

are represented to be thus cheaply expiated ; and which hold out hereafter, rather an alluring than an alarming prospect.

A third clear doctrine of Scripture, and the last which I shall mention, which is fully confirmed by the observation of every thing around us, is also particularly adapted to that precarious tenure of our lives, which is the subject of our present consideration ;—I mean, that we are here in a state of trial : and that, notwithstanding the infinite variety of our conditions and qualifications, we are all, without exception, from the monarch on his throne, to the peasant in his cottage, or the captive in his dungeon, in this respect, equally under the eye of our omniscient Judge, and equally preparing by our conduct for that awful tribunal, before which we must appear to receive our final sentence. Indisputable as this truth is, I fear it is one of those, of which, on that very account perhaps, we continually lose sight, and fail to profit by ; and of which, therefore, we cannot be too frequently reminded from this place. The most important practical truths are those which are most evident, and against which we seldom offend from ignorance, but often from negligence and inat-

tention. Were we at all times duly impressed with the fleeting nature of our present existence, and sufficiently conscious that *here we have no continuing city*, is it conceivable, that our conduct would not be very frequently very different from what it is? But the misfortune is, that whilst we are young, or in the enjoyment of health and strength, the idea of our death is one of the very last which we willingly admit into our minds; we live as if *immortality* were our *present lot*, rather than *that* for which we have to prepare. To such an extent do many carry this infatuation, that they neglect to transact even those worldly concerns which remind them of their dissolution, till they are almost incapable of bestowing upon them the necessary attention. And what hope is there, therefore, that their spiritual interests have been better regarded? If they were in the habit of reflecting, that every day might possibly be their last upon earth, could they fail to be anxious about that eternity upon which they were about to enter? And being so anxious, what an important change must it not instantly produce in their lives? How different do the very same objects frequently appear from different points



of view! Just so it is with our thoughts, principles, and actions. When seen through the medium of *this world only*, how different is their aspect from what they present, when *another* also intervenes between them! How well does the gloom of earthly vision accord with many things, which the light of heaven would shew to be hideous! Were we to try our conduct in any particular instance, by the test of whether it were fitted to produce our eternal happiness or misery—is it possible to believe that we should err so often, and so widely, as we do? Were Christians generally to regulate themselves by their own professed principles, could the world exhibit that scene of confusion, of vice, and of misery, which we have such abundant cause to deplore? And should any thing tend more powerfully to bring about this great change in us, than the consciousness that our time here *fleeth as it were a shadow, so soon passeth it away, and we are gone?*

It seems to me, therefore, that although in *some* instances the ways of Providence are inscrutable by us, yet that in *this* under our contemplation, there is no difficulty. Whether we consider it with reference to this world, or

another, or to both, it is evidently a wise and merciful dispensation ; and the lesson which it reads to us, is too clear to be mistaken, and too important to be neglected. *Watch*, is the impressive conclusion which our Saviour himself deduced from it, and to obey that injunction is equally our duty and our interest. If at all times the observation of unexpected mortality should awaken us to a sense of what may happen to ourselves, and to the consequent necessity of being always prepared for *that hour*, which *may* arrive much sooner than any of us expect it ; there is something in this solemn season of Advent which should peculiarly force it upon our attention. Our services at this time lead us at once to commemorate the first coming of our Lord to save the world, and to anticipate his second and final advent to judge the world. These two stupendous events are (as I have more than once observed) necessarily and inseparably connected. If the one has not taken place, the other need not be apprehended ;—but if we have no more reason to doubt, than we have of our own existence, that Jesus Christ, almost two thousand years ago, came *to visit us in great humility*, we must be equally cer-

tain, that he *will come again in his glorious majesty, to judge both the quick and dead.* If we believe the accounts of what he actually said, and did, and suffered for us, we must also believe that he will faithfully perform all that he promised. And what was his promise with respect to his future coming? *When the Son of Man (said he) shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.* And the latter (that is, the wicked,) *shall go away into everlasting punishment,* but the former, (that is, the righteous,) *into life eternal.* It has been well observed, that to these he says, *Come, ye blessed of my Father;* but to the others, simply, *go ye cursed—because God is the author and procurer of men's happiness, but man only is the author of his own misery*<sup>1</sup>.—But this can only be true upon the supposition of a future state of just retribution; because,

<sup>1</sup> Whitby.

although all the happiness which we can enjoy in this world, and still more that which we can expect in another, is clearly to be traced to the *Author and Giver of all good things* ; and although the misery which we may endure hereafter, can only result from our own misconduct ; yet, it is certain, that we *may* suffer *here* great misfortunes and severe afflictions ; in fact, be rendered very miserable from causes not proceeding from ourselves, and over which we have no control ;—whether they are to be ascribed to the visitations of Providence, or to the malice and injustice of our fellow-men. For these, the reward held out to us by the Gospel in another life, can *alone* afford us any compensation. To that future life, therefore, every reasonable man must look with the deepest anxiety ; and whether he feels that he has reason to expect its happiness, or to dread its misery, when he reflects that at every moment he is liable to be summoned before that awful tribunal which will inevitably pronounce his eternal and unalterable destiny ; he can neither require, nor conceive, a more powerful motive to keep himself in that state of constant vigilance and preparation which our Saviour himself has so

earnestly exhorted him to maintain. And he will see clearly, that the *uncertainty* of the present life is a strong argument for the *certainty* of another; because, together they form a system of perfection worthy of the Divine Being from whom it proceeds; in which, all that now appears confused, unintelligible, or wrong, will ultimately be restored to order, harmony, and justice, in which the ways of God to man will be fully vindicated: and none will be finally unhappy but those to whom the solemn warnings of reason, of conscience, and of revelation, have been addressed in vain: but who have obstinately continued to live in disobedience to God's commandments, in distrust, or in denial of his power, or his intention, to reward or punish them according to their deserts. May our conduct from henceforth be the very reverse of this—and may we *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*, in sure expectation of the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in earnest hope of being received by him, with these transporting words—*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world!*

## SERMON V.

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LUKE ii. 10, 11.

*And the angel said unto them, fear not : for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

THESE words present our holy religion to us under a point of view the most interesting, and the most satisfactory that can be conceived; and the best adapted to lead us to such reflections as are peculiarly suitable to the occasion, upon which we are now assembled. However Christians may differ amongst themselves upon points of faith, and consequently divide themselves into separate churches and sects; they probably would all agree that *this* is the common character of Christianity, under all its various forms, that *it is* a subject of great joy to all those who live

under its protecting guidance and control, whose conduct is regulated by its precepts, whose virtues are kindled by its hopes, whose vices are restrained by its terrors. From its first promulgation to the present hour, *this* may truly be affirmed of it, notwithstanding all the reproaches that have been cast upon it; for it is justly chargeable with none of those things which have so frequently been urged to its prejudice. All the dissensions, the persecutions, the wars, and the atrocities, which have been ascribed to it, have been, in reality, in *direct opposition* to its benevolent genius and spirit: and have been owing entirely to its wilful perversion by wicked and unprincipled men. Though we should be obliged to admit the assertion of a late celebrated historian, that it is a “melancholy truth, that Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other than they have experienced from the zeal of infidels<sup>1</sup> :” it would still remain unquestionable, that it is not to any of the real doctrines of their religion, but to the bigotry, the ambition, the avarice, and various other

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, c. xvi.

bad passions of the human heart, that all this calamity is to be imputed. Its very announcement from heaven, in the words of the text, is utterly inconsistent with the notion, that it is not in itself eminently calculated to diffuse joy and happiness wherever it is known and received.

How then does it appear, that this *is* its essential property and characteristic? To this I should say, that the mind of man requires religion for its support, as much as his body requires food. Hence it has happened, that no civilized nation has existed, or can hardly be conceived to exist, without religion. It has always been either the cause, or the necessary consequence of a change from a state of barbarism to one of social order and well-regulated government. Some mode of religion, however erroneous, has ever been found necessary to the support of society, and has powerfully contributed to the happiness of those who have lived under it. And if this be true, even of those religions which we know to be founded in error, it must be more evidently so, of that which we justly believe to be divine. For it must be remembered, as



has been well observed by Dr. Paley<sup>1</sup>, that “with *us*, the question is between that religion and none: for no one, with whom *we* have to do, will support the pretensions of any other.” Except then we are prepared to admit, that with reference to *this world alone*, we could live more happily without religion than with it, we must needs confess that we have great reason to rejoice in the possession of one which can be replaced by no other; which, were its Divine original less certain than it is, is unquestionably calculated to answer all the purposes for which a revelation from heaven could be desired or accorded. It does seem, therefore, one of the most extraordinary things in the history of human folly or wickedness, that men should appear from time to time, up to the present hour, who have laboured to subvert our faith, professing at the same time a love for virtue, and a regard for the interests of mankind. Is it conceivable that they can delude themselves so far as to think, that could they succeed in their object, the world would go on *better*

<sup>1</sup> Evidences, vol. i. page 1.

than it does, or even that it could go on *at all*? If so much of vice and misery prevails in it, even under the present systems of belief, however various they may be, what bounds would be opposed to its licence and depravity, were those wholesome restraints entirely withdrawn? Can any man in his senses believe, that the bulk of mankind can regulate themselves by principles of reason and philosophy, which is the substance and the very language of every deistical scheme that has hitherto appeared, which professes any regard for the welfare of the human race? And it is but justice to their authors to admit, that, so far as I am acquainted with them, they all abound in such profession. But can they afford a surer test of the fallacy of their systems, and of their own incompetence to the task of reforming the morals, and improving the condition of mankind, than by ascribing as they do, and *must* do for their purpose, to the generality of men, the possession of mental powers and moral excellence, which they manifestly never *have* possessed, nor *can* reasonably be expected to attain? Did they maintain virtue to be as useless to society as religion, there might be, perhaps, some consistency in their argu-

ments. But to applaud virtue, and to wish to deprive it of its highest sanction, its most powerful stimulus, and its most perfect exemplification, is surely an attempt not less absurd than profligate. For, supposing such a person had not only unhappily persuaded himself that Christianity was not true, but that he was even well founded in that persuasion, I should still contend, that upon his own principles he was bound to respect it, and not to endeavour to make proselytes to his opinion. For though he should deny Christianity to be true, he could not so much as pretend to prove that it is false. He *must* content himself with refusing to believe it, as a native of a southern climate might refuse to believe that water, in our northern latitudes, ever acquires the strength and consistency of ice. The reasons for disbelief in both cases, when fairly examined, would appear to be nearly the same; neither would have had any experience of the matters in question, and both would be unwilling to credit the testimony by which they are supported.

But, rejecting Christianity, has he any other religion to substitute in its place? So from it, the little that he believes, which he

*any truth* and *any value* in it, is borrowed, whether he knows it or not, from Christianity; and without its assistance, would be found very difficult of proof. He professes, for instance, to believe in one God; but how can he establish that *first*, almost that *sole* article of his creed, but by the aid of the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures? He is also the advocate of virtue, and the enemy of vice. But upon what solid ground, except he advances a step farther, and believes not only that *God is, but that he is a rewarder* of the one, and a punisher of the other?—a truth of which Revelation alone can afford him a full conviction. I contend, therefore, that even he who doubts or disbelieves the evidence of Christianity should, notwithstanding, if he be a wise and good man, rejoice in its success, because much of it is, even according to *him*, “a republication of natural religion<sup>1</sup>,” because it lays the greatest stress upon many virtues, which he professes to admire, as conducive to the welfare of society; because, in common candour he must allow, that he is as liable to error in rejecting it, as others are in receiving it; and

because it is impossible for him to deny, that the consequences of error on his side *may* be extremely serious, whilst on the other they *must* be altogether harmless.

But if even infidels might find reasons to rejoice in the diffusion of that religion, which *we* must esteem it their misfortune at least, not to believe, how much cause have Christians of every description to exult in its progress, and to hail with the warmest feelings of devotion the return of *this* day, upon which they commemorate the birth of their Saviour Christ the Lord : and renew to the Almighty their solemn praise and thanksgiving for that auspicious event ! However we may lament the differences of opinion which have so long divided the Christian world into separate communions, it is satisfactory to reflect, that they are still united under one common denomination. However important are the points upon which they *differ*, those are still more so upon which they *agree*. Much as they dispute upon matters of faith, they are nearly unanimous with respect to practice. At most, they do but pursue the same end by various means ; and hence Christianity, in its most general sense, must be a subject of sincere joy to

all its professors. But in proportion as their peculiar tenets are marked and sanctified by that charity, which is its highest attribute, which is *the very bond of peace, and of all virtues*, will their joy be pure and fervent. The more extensive are the blessings of which they believe it to be the parent, the more gratefully will they receive it; the more partially they conceive its benefits to be bestowed, the fainter must be the satisfaction which they inspire. Wherever the doctrine of *exclusive Salvation* prevails, upon whatever ground, the Gospel no longer proclaims *glory to God in the highest, nor on earth peace and good-will towards men*. Amongst all the classes of Christians, therefore, there is not one whom the return of this day should more warmly exhilarate than ourselves. As Protestants of the Church of England, we believe the benefits of Christianity to be universal. Trusting that our own view of its doctrines is correct, we nevertheless disclaim all pretension to infallibility; nor do we presume to arrogate to ourselves the right of condemning those who differ from us in opinion. If it should be thought that the damnatory clauses of the creed, which has been recited to-day,

*do* go to this extent, I can only say, that in the judgment of very able and good men, they are not to be so interpreted. They are to be considered merely as repeating the declaration of our Saviour, as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of St. Mark. They must be understood as assuming the truth of Christianity in general, and of the particular doctrines laid down in the creed. And upon that assumption, they pronounce that those who reject them will suffer for so doing, though neither the nature, nor the degree of suffering, are to be considered as defined by the terms employed. Nothing is wanted, in the judgment of a very judicious writer, to remove all difficulty and uneasiness respecting this creed, than to qualify and restrain it by the plainest and most self-evident of all moral propositions: "No man is punishable for rejecting falshood<sup>1</sup>." Whilst, therefore, we, who believe the Christian Revelation to be true, and our ideas of it to be the most correct, cannot suppose that it can be rejected with impunity; I hope there are few of us who would not not agree with the sentiment of a very emi-

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, vol. iii. p. 105.

nent writer of the seventeenth century, John Hales, of Eton, who, as Lord Clarendon informs us, "would often say, that he would renounce the Church of England, if it obliged him to believe that any other Christians would be damned<sup>1</sup>." Nor can this be imputed to excess of liberality, or culpable indifference to right or wrong, in matters of religion. His history completely refutes such an imputation. *Intolerance* is a very questionable test of *sincerity*. I do not know that it is at all true, that the latter quality abounds most in *that* Church, in which the former chiefly prevails. But I will not pursue this reflection, because it would divert me from that topic upon which it is my object *to-day* to fix our undivided attention, the joy which our holy religion is calculated to excite in our hearts.

Surely it is not without reason, that we indulge at this season in more than ordinary feelings of content and satisfaction. Is it doubtful that the many customs which prevail of a benevolent character, at this period of the year, are to be ascribed to the influence

<sup>1</sup> Clarendon's Life, vol. i. p. 60.



of the faith which we profess? Is it not natural that we should be grateful for the blessings which it imparts, and anxious to diffuse them? Who can live in a Christian community without being sensible of its inestimable value to society? Who cannot trace in his particular condition, his purest happiness to that source? What was it, which (humanly speaking) occasioned its speedy triumph over heathen superstition? Not surely the novelty, nor the sublimity of its creed, but the altered lives, manners, and dispositions of its converts. The excellence of the Christian morality has always been esteemed, not only a most valuable part of the religion, but also a powerful argument of its truth. Chillingworth<sup>1</sup>, a writer, who, in some respects, is deserving of our attention, has not scrupled to say—"For my part I profess, if the doctrine of Scripture were not as good, and as fit to come from the fountain of goodness, as the miracles by which it was confirmed were great, I should want one main pillar of my faith<sup>2</sup>." And to come nearer to our own

<sup>1</sup> See his character, as drawn by Lord Clarendon.

<sup>2</sup> Religion of Protestants, p. 61.

times—amongst the five causes of its success, assigned by Mr. Gibbon, one was “the pure and austere morals of the Christians.” Nor was it probably at all inferior in its operation to any of the others. Men, whose faith induced them to bind themselves by an oath, “to allow themselves in no crime or immoral conduct whatever<sup>1</sup>,”—and who, doubtless, lived very much in conformity with that obligation, could not but attract notice, and wherever any good dispositions existed, could hardly fail to produce imitators. The singular *combination* of virtues which they displayed, *must also* have contributed greatly to their success. Their general meekness, and their peaceable and unambitious deportment, *by themselves*, would only have been calculated to secure the contempt of the Pagan world; but the courage and fortitude with which they endured the severest persecutions, must have excited the admiration even of their enemies, and led them to examine into the history and the doctrines of a religion, which was capable of producing such astonishing effects. What was the speedy result of that

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. i. page 34.

examination is well known. *The Word of God grew mightily, and prevailed.* Its progress was constant and rapid, insomuch that in little more than three hundred years from the first preaching of the fishermen of Galilee, the Roman Empire became Christian; and from that hour to this, notwithstanding various checks, and many very unfavourable circumstances, the religion has continued to advance. Nor have we any well-founded reasons to fear, that all its promises will not in due time be fulfilled. That it is destined to become universal, seems not only to be foretold by the prophets, and declared by its Divine founder, but to be inherent in its very nature. A religion authentically revealed from heaven, even though left to make its way by human means and instruments, must ultimately triumph over all obstacles. That Christians should themselves first be united in one profession of faith, would undoubtedly be an important step to this great end. Nor has this appeared to many wise and good men, to be by any means a visionary and impracticable scheme. An able writer whom I have already quoted, almost two centuries ago, “thought that pride and passion, more than

conscience, were the cause of all separation from each others' communion : and that *that* only kept the world from agreeing upon such a liturgy, as might bring them into one communion : all points of doctrine, upon which men differed in their opinions, being to have no place in any liturgy<sup>1</sup>." This last notion seems to me to be not very judicious, because its tendency is to reduce religion to an empty form, scarcely deserving of the name. But, instead of attempting to cut off every thing about which men differ, may we not indulge the hope, that a time is gradually approaching when they will cease to differ so widely ; and by mutual concessions, founded upon more enlarged and more enlightened views of Scripture, come to an agreement upon all the essential points of Christianity ?

When we consider that our holy religion is not to be sought in a variety of books, and much less of discordant books ; but that the whole is contained in one volume, and *that* of no very great extent ; and that the only question is as to its meaning ; it does *not* seem by any means an unreasonable expectation, that

<sup>1</sup> John Hales.

its real sense should finally be ascertained. Had it always been examined dispassionately, with the single view of discovering truth, unfettered by prejudice, unmixed with interest, undazzled by ambition—is it possible that the history of Christianity should be disfigured by so many frivolous, or interminable controversies as it is? Frivolous, where the matter disputed is of no real importance—interminable, when the subjects discussed lie far beyond our comprehension. If we may reasonably anticipate a period of brighter, more durable, and more beneficial triumphs for the Gospel, than any which it has yet known, it can only be founded upon the progressive improvement of the human mind in sound knowledge, with its natural attendant of purer morals. The darkest ages of the Church, those in which its corruptions originated and were matured, were also those of the deepest mental gloom and ignorance. With the revival of learning its reformation was achieved. And all its subsequent disorders, whether from bigotry or fanaticism, are clearly to be traced to intellectual imbecility, or to gross depravity. Whether, therefore, we look to the past, the present, or the future, we discover abundant cause to be

convinced that the announcement of the birth of our Saviour was indeed *good tidings of great joy to all people*. For it has settled points of the greatest importance, which philosophers would for ever have debated, without coming to any satisfactory conclusion. Points upon which depend our truest happiness in this world, founded upon our assured expectation of another. For that Christianity *alone* is capable of producing these effects, we have only to look at the past or present condition of the generality of mankind, in Pagan countries, to be fully convinced.

Although I am far from thinking that it has even *yet* accomplished all the good which it is manifestly designed to accomplish ; it has done enough to satisfy us of what it is capable, when it is taught with simplicity, believed with sincerity, and practised conscientiously. May we all, then, in our respective stations, cordially co-operate to these great ends ! May we hail the return of this joyful season of our Church, as if the glad tidings of the angel were still ringing in our ears ! But let us remember, that they are only glad tidings to us, according to the use which we make of them. It is not the mere profession of Christianity

that will constitute us Christians. Our *lives* must attest the sincerity of our faith. If good actions *alone* will not save us, much less can we be saved *without* them. *They are pleasing and acceptable to God* (says our article) *in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.* The clearest doctrine of the Gospel is this, that we must practise its precepts. *If ye love me,* (says our Saviour) *keep my commandments.* May this injunction be always present in our minds, and binding upon our consciences : and we shall infallibly feel *that joy* which true Christianity is designed to inspire ! A joy not confined to our own bosoms, but of the most diffusive and comprehensive kind ; anxious to impart itself not only to all Christians of every denomination, but extending its sympathy to the whole human race. A joy, not casual and transient, but constantly filling our hearts with the satisfaction of knowing, that we are endeavouring at least to perform our duty to God and our fellow-creatures. A joy, which will survive every other joy which this world can afford, by cheering that solemn hour when

we must all leave it, with the bright prospect of eternal happiness in the world to come.

Let us embrace then the present opportunity of affording a proof both of our faith and obedience. Let us approach the table of our Lord, and there at once renew our vows of fidelity to him, and of peace and charity with each other! Let no light, or trivial cause, or groundless apprehension, interfere with this sacred duty! If we are conscious that our faith is neither so firm, nor our conduct so pure, as they might be; let us pray at the altar of our God for grace to invigorate the one, and to amend the other! Above all, let us not select the day upon which we celebrate the nativity of our Lord, for disobeying *this* his almost last injunction—*Do this in remembrance of me.*



## SERMON VI.

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MATTHEW xi. 3.

*Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another ?*

WHAT was the object of the Baptist in proposing this question to Jesus, is not quite certain. Whether it were to satisfy his own doubts, or those of his disciples, does not distinctly appear. But into these considerations, (though they are neither uninteresting nor unprofitable,) it is not my present purpose to enter. My intention is to regard the text in a different point of view, to bring it more immediately home to ourselves, to treat it as a topic of present enquiry ; and to see what answer our reason and consciences, aided by the light of the Scriptures, and the experience of eighteen centuries will enable us to return to it. If, as preliminary to the question, whether Jesus were the promised Messiah ;

another should be asked ; namely, was the advent of such a person a matter of expediency or necessity ? I should reply in the words of Paley, that “ I deem it unnecessary to prove that mankind stood in need of a Revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that, even under the Christian dispensation, we have too much light, or any degree of assurance that is superfluous<sup>1</sup>.” Taking it for granted then, that there *were* at the time of the advent of our Saviour, and but for that advent, there would be *now* some things highly important for us to know, but absolutely beyond our faculties to discover ; I shall enquire, whether the light which he has thrown upon those vital, but perplexing subjects, be not sufficient (independently of the direct proofs which we have,) to render it in the highest degree probable, that he was *that Person*, whose appearance the Baptist, in common with his countrymen, at that time expected ?—The answer returned by our Lord to his question, is well known. He referred to his miracles ; and to their beneficent character, and to the fact that his Gospel was preached to the poor :

<sup>1</sup> Evidences, vol.i. p. 1.

that is, that it was addressed to all mankind, (for if it was intelligible to the humblest classes of society, it must of necessity be so to those of more elevated condition)—he referred to these things as proofs that he was commissioned by a Being of boundless power and goodness, to proclaim religious truth to the world!

It was formerly much more the custom than it is at present, to insist upon the principles of what is called natural religion. Many very able and excellent men have employed much learning, ability, and ingenuity, in treating of this topic : amongst whom I know of none more distinguished and more successful, than a writer of the last century, Mr. Wollaston ; yet, even in his profound and admirable reasoning, there lurks this fallacy—That it proceeds from a mind thoroughly enlightened by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and by all the deductions which, in a long course of ages, have been established upon their foundation. However just, therefore, his arguments may be, it remains to be proved, whether they could be invented by any one who was totally uninformed of the doctrines of Revelation : and whether, in fact,

they are not derived from that source, though unconsciously, by their author? But this is not all: they are liable to a still more serious objection. If it be true, that the light of nature is sufficient for the discovery of a complete system of religion, where was the necessity, or the utility, of those two Divine dispensations which are contained in the Bible? Is it conceivable that the Almighty would have employed such stupendous means for our instruction in truths relating to himself, to ourselves, and to each other, to our present and our *future* state, if he had already endowed us with faculties to discover all these things? Yet such is the conclusion to which all such arguments inevitably tend. For it is soon perceived by those who employ them, that without the doctrine of a future state they are quite unsatisfactory; and, accordingly, they are reduced to the necessity of endeavouring to establish *that* also, upon the ground of natural reason: and thus to dispense with one of the main objects of the Gospel Revelation.

Of all the questions which have ever occu-

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston's Religion of Nature, page 399.

pied the minds of reflecting men, that of a future state is undoubtedly the most momentous. Whether this life be the whole of our existence, or but a stage in our progress to another, it concerns us above all things to know. Now, it is not enough to say, that the wisest of the heathen philosophers had doubts upon this matter, and that very few of them advanced *even* so far as *that*; but we may safely affirm, that the united wisdom of all the sages who have ever lived, would be insufficient to determine this point with certainty. What was the precise state of the question amongst the Jews at the coming of our Saviour, is not quite clear. We read, indeed, that they were divided upon it. *For that the Sadducees say, there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.* But Grotius<sup>1</sup> is of opinion, that this notion of the Pharisees was founded rather upon tradition and conjecture, than upon any certain grounds. This at least is clear, that if they *were* firmly convinced of it, their conviction could only be derived from the doctrines of their prophets, who, being inspired

<sup>1</sup> Upon Matthew xxii. 28.

to predict the coming of the Saviour, might also foretel one of its most important consequences ; namely, the clearing up of this great point ;—in other words, that their knowledge must be traced to Revelation. For, notwithstanding all that has been written upon that subject, if it were possible for *us* to unlearn all that we have acquired from that source ; I would put it to any man, whether, even in the present highly cultivated state of the reasoning faculties, his mind must not instantly relapse into all that doubt and perplexity, which the wisest men of antiquity felt and expressed upon this awful subject. Our Saviour then, in bringing *life and immortality to light*, by assuring us of a future state of retribution, has communicated to us from heaven that information, which only from *thence* we could obtain ; and has finally settled that great question upon which we must otherwise have speculated continually, and speculated in vain.

But it is obvious, that even *this* information, important as it is, would have been almost useless if it had rested there. The knowledge of a future life, with its rewards and punishments, would have been any thing but a blessing to us, if we had not also been

taught by the same Divine authority, how to secure the one and to avoid the other. The sublime simplicity of the Christian morality, though in the highest degree characteristic of its sacred original, is probably the reason why it is so frequently disregarded or undervalued. Did mankind consist of nothing but philosophers, whose lives were passed in ease and opulence, in contemplative retirement, or in splendid and honourable activity, we might perhaps have expected to have found amongst the precepts of the Gospel, some of a different kind from those which we there meet with; some rules of conduct in cases which *then* might be common, though *now* they are of rare occurrence. But even *then*, I doubt whether the maxims of Jesus, if pursued to their legitimate consequences, would not be found amply sufficient for the regulation of human beings, in any circumstances in which they could be placed. But when we consider what the bulk of mankind always must be, in point of intellectual acquirements, what the nature of their occupations, and what the relations which they have with each other; and when we reflect that the Gospel was preached especially to the poor, doubtless, because under that description so large a por-

tion of mankind is included, and because religion, which is equally the concern of *all*, *must*, to be beneficial, be rendered intelligible to all; we shall be little inclined to wonder at the plain but comprehensive character of the morality upon which, (so far as depends upon ourselves,) no less than our eternal salvation is at issue. But on the contrary, we shall recognize with sincere conviction, the Divine mind of our Lord, in that vigorous compression, with which, after having upon various occasions laid down so many admirable rules for our conduct, he summed them all up in those two great commandments, the love of God and of our neighbour; thereby establishing for ever a code of virtue, which, “he that runs may read,”—which the simplest can hardly misunderstand, and the wisest will vainly endeavour to improve.

If this be (as it evidently is,) the prominent feature of the Gospel—if addressing itself especially to the poor—and offering them heaven as the reward of those humble virtues, which their condition and circumstances would enable them to practise—if speaking occasionally to the rich, and teaching *them* to *enter into life by keeping the command-*



*ments*—if professing itself: to be a religion calculated for, and ultimately destined to embrace all mankind in its observance—if, notwithstanding all this, it did nevertheless promulge doctrines as essential to salvation, which neither the poor nor the rich could at all comprehend—if, representing this life as a state of probation, it held out nothing by which we could be tried, seeing that the doom of all men had been irrevocably fixed from all eternity—if, offering salvation *to all*, upon certain conditions, it still mocked the hopes of the great majority, by assuring them that their fate would depend upon a previous and absolute election, not to be reversed by any efforts of their own—if, indeed, the volume of Revelation did contain all these palpable and grievous contradictions, must we not, however, reluctantly conclude, that it was utterly useless to us, from being utterly unintelligible? But, that it is the very reverse of all this, a simple and practical rule of life, level to the capacities of all, and equally and universally beneficial, I cannot but consider to be one of the clearest proofs of its Divine original.

But there are those, who, admitting this,

still seem to think that too much importance may be attached to the moral precepts of the Gospel: who, excellent as they are, imagine that the light of nature might have dictated some of them; who find in the writers of Pagan antiquity splendid maxims of virtue, and in their lives some instances of its practice; who, jealous of the mysteries of Christianity, which it is far from my intention to deny or to depreciate, assign them altogether a predominant place in their religious system. But to this opinion I can by no means accede. With every allowance for heathen virtue, both in speculation and practice, I must still think that the morality which Jesus taught *as a whole*, is not only pure, but original and Divine. Looking through all history, what traces can we find that the light of nature and the efforts of human reason are sufficient to make any approach to it? What vice can be named, however repugnant to our moral sense, when aided by Revelation, which has not been openly, and it should seem unconsciously, practised in countries highly civilized in many respects, both in ancient and modern times? Look to the horrible incests, adulteries, and murders, which so long prevailed,

and probably still in some degree prevail, amongst the Persians<sup>1</sup> and other eastern nations! Look to the notions of revenge and suicide, which pervaded all heathen antiquity—not to mention the licentious spirit of Mahometanism, which still overspreads so large a portion of the earth; or the aspect which human nature, in the savage state, still presents wherever it is so found! It is not that vices of all kinds are not much too frequently perpetrated amongst Christians, but that they are against Christianity, and are generally abhorred and punished; whereas, under every other religious system, many of them are publicly tolerated or admired.

But let those who think we can estimate too highly the value of Christian morals, who imagine them to be too obvious to escape the discovery of enlightened men, who conceive their promulgation to be a matter hardly of moment enough to require the especial interposition of the Deity—consider what mankind *would* be, were they universally obeyed, and what the Christian world *is*, even under their very limited observance. It will be time

<sup>1</sup> See Prideaux's Connection passim.

enough to detract from their value, when the full effect of their operation can be calculated and ascertained ; when, for example, the rich, I do not say, *sell all that they have to give to the poor*, but when they *generally* devote even a *moderate* portion of their *superfluity* to that purpose—when, not to speak of *loving their enemies*, they are accustomed to regard even their *friends*, with sentiments of genuine and disinterested kindness and benevolence : when, not to insist upon taking *no thought for the morrow*, their whole souls are not incessantly occupied in the gratification of their earthly appetites and affections. It will be time enough to treat them as easy of discovery, when it can be shewn, not that they are naturally inherent in the mind of every man, but when even any polished nation, not Christian, can be produced, which has possessed them in all their integrity. It will be time enough to question the necessity for their Divine communication, when any sage can be mentioned, whose scheme of ethics will sustain any competition with the pure and perfect precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But if the simplicity of some parts of the Gospel thus evinces that its author came from

heaven, there are others whose sublimity still more irresistibly attests the same stupendous truth. I allude not to his incarnation, his miracles, his death, resurrection, and ascension; these are historical facts, to be proved like other facts by testimony. But when I am endeavouring to argue from his *doctrines alone*, that he must have been Divine, I cannot pass by that which pre-eminently entitles him to that sacred character; I mean his atonement. He tells us himself, that he *came to give his life a ransom for many*. This is, indeed, a subject of the deepest mystery. The vicarious sacrifice of Christ is a matter, to the full apprehension of which our faculties are quite unequal. But so far as we can understand it, we can see that it completes and harmonizes with the morality of the Gospel. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*, is the crowning precept of that beautiful system. Yet it is addressed to those, whom its author assures, that *when they have done all which is commanded them, they are unprofitable servants*. In truth, that invincible propensity to error, of which every man is in some degree conscious, which the Pagans openly confessed,

and from which not even St. Paul after his conversion was exempt, would seem to form a complete bar to our claim to an eternal reward upon the ground of our own merits. When we are taught, therefore, that after having done our utmost, we are still to hope for salvation only through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ—that his transcendent excellence has supplied our lamentable deficiency—that his *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice*, has atoned for our guilt, whether personal or derived—we have at least a doctrine, which is intelligible for all practical purposes, of which we can comprehend enough for our guidance in this life ; which binds us to our duty by the strongest ties of gratitude to our Redeemer, and of concern for ourselves : which, in fine, established the divinity of our religion, by shewing that its very *basis* is one, which as no human power could have formed, so no human intellect could have conceived.

Upon the whole, then, we cannot but conclude, that we have abundant reason to be satisfied, from the peculiar and perfect nature of his doctrines, that Jesus was indeed *he that should come*, the promised Messiah, the ex-

pectation of Israel, the Redeemer of the world. But admitting this to be true, a question of great interest may yet remain to be decided: namely, this, *do we, notwithstanding, still look for another?* Perhaps, as Christians we shall be very ready to answer, no; but let us see distinctly why we are so confident upon that point. If we conclude that we have no reason to expect any future instruction from heaven, it can be only upon this solid ground—That the faith which we profess is not only *true*, but is also *sufficient* for all the purposes for which a Divine Revelation can be supposed to have been vouchsafed to mankind. That is, to guide them safely and happily through the difficulties of this probationary world; and, finally, to secure their complete felicity in another of eternal duration. But from this results this important consideration: that the Revelation which we have, will cease to be effectual to its great end, should it ever become generally eluded by superstition, or debased by fanaticism. And that, consequently, it is the clear duty of every Christian, but especially of every minister of the Gospel, to exert his best efforts, to preserve *the faith once delivered to*

*the saints*, in all its original beauty and simplicity ; and to shew that genuine Christianity is a religion, not less worthy of God to bestow, than adapted for man to receive—not more powerfully addressed to the heart, than clearly approved by the understanding. If it *be* such a religion, further light is neither to be expected nor desired. But if it be *not*, we have at least abundant reason to hope and to pray for additional information upon this momentous subject. If, indeed, the Gospel of Christ be what so many enthusiasts of the present day labour mischievously to represent it ; a partial dispensation, by which the Deity announces to his creatures, that he has selected some of them for salvation, and destined the rest to perdition, without reference to any merit or demerit of their own : and that he has afforded to the favoured few, some satisfactory, but inexplicable means of ascertaining that they are the exclusive objects of his choice ; if an all-wise, all-powerful, and beneficent being, can have allotted the reward of virtue to those who may not have been virtuous : or can have determined to punish others for actions which he has given them no power to control : if the fate of countless



millions of human beings of very limited faculties is to depend *hereafter*, not upon their obedience to plain precepts *here*, but upon their profession of unintelligible doctrines; if not to *cease to do evil, and to learn to do well*; but to be spiritualized, to feel the operation of the Holy Ghost, to experience sensations which they cannot define, and to be guided by a light which they alone can discern: if to adopt a system of faith, which, *acted upon*, would totally unfit them for the business of the world, in which they have a part to perform; but which, if *not acted upon*, becomes a mere empty speculation, or a fantastic dream—if, I say, all this be any thing like the Revelation of the Gospel, further light is undoubtedly to be wished for; and *another Jesus* devoutly to be looked for, to clear up and explain what is at present involved in impenetrable obscurity.

But if the very reverse of all this be (as we trust it is) the truth—if the Gospel has *brought life and immortality to light*, by assuring us of another state of existence, *in which they that have done good shall be eternally rewarded, and they that have done evil eternally punished*—if it has clearly defined the

doing good to consist in obedience to God, and in love to our fellow-creatures: if it has exacted from us not more than we are able to perform, but has required of every man only to make the best use of such talents as have been entrusted to him; if it has instructed us, that salvation has indeed been purchased for us by our Saviour, but only upon conditions which we are bound to observe; that those conditions, though arduous, are not impracticable, being no other than *to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world*; that is, to be kind to others, and innocent in ourselves—if, in short, it has called upon us to evince our faith by our practice, and has assured us that we *must*, with the assistance of that Divine grace which is denied to none who seek for it, *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*; then may we be confident, that we have *not* another Saviour *to look for*—that as no future Revelation is promised to us, so is none other necessary; that the light which we have is, indeed, the true light: whose bright and glorious effulgence is abundantly sufficient to guide us safely to the mansions of peace and eternal felicity.

## SERMON VII.

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LUKE XXIV. 27.

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.*

THE two main pillars of Christianity are undoubtedly prophecy and miracles. Though they might properly be considered but as one, since the former is clearly a species of the latter; yet are they usually treated separately, because there are marked differences between them. The one being better calculated for the conviction of those who witness them, than for succeeding generations, who believe them only upon testimony: and losing, perhaps, something of their force by the lapse of time. The other being designed to influence posterity, and frequently a very distant posterity, and consequently gaining strength by

the revolution of ages<sup>1</sup>. So admirably has the wisdom of Providence adapted both these great instruments to the accomplishment of those purposes for which he has been pleased to call mankind into existence. This distinction between prophecy and miracles is noticed by St. Peter in his second Epistle to the newly-converted Christians. After having assured them for the confirmation of their faith, that he and the other Apostles, had not *followed cunningly devised fables, when they made known unto them the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty*—he adds—*we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.* By which he could not mean that the prophecies were surer evidence to himself, that Christ had appeared, than the miracles which he had seen him perform: but that they might be so to them, whom he was addressing, and to those who should live after them: because by considering those predic-

<sup>1</sup> See Warburton's Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 341, &c.

tions which had already been verified by his first coming; they might encrease their confidence in those which related to his second and final appearance.

To each of these two strong grounds of our faith, our attention is necessarily very frequently directed: because we can hardly read a page of the Old Testament, without being deeply impressed with the one: or open the New without being powerfully affected by the other; and because it is not a little remarkable, that whilst believers confidently appeal to each of them in support of their faith: unbelievers as confidently rely upon them to justify their infidelity: the former considering them as clear evidences of truth: and the latter treating them as marks of imposture.

At this season of the year our services naturally lead us much to the consideration of the prophecies relating to our Saviour: and I think that our time here cannot be better employed than in examining any of their difficulties, and refuting any of the objections that have been urged against them. If there are any persons who think that there are *no* difficulties in the Scriptures: and that it is not worth while to bestow any attention upon

those who insist upon them : I confess that I am not one of that number. On the contrary, I cannot deny their existence, nor shut my eyes to the effects which they may produce upon different descriptions of persons : and I know of no duty, therefore, more imperative upon a Christian minister, than to endeavour to confirm the faith of those who *do* believe : and to convince those who *do not*. Nor should he ever in my judgment consider the former a superfluous task, or the latter a hopeless one : but should constantly bear in mind and act upon this advice of the great Apostle—*Now we exhort you, brethren, (says St. Paul to the Thessalonians,) warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*” And, his instruction to the same effect to Titus, that *holding fast the faithful word as he had been taught, he might be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

With these few preliminary observations, I shall proceed at once to the consideration of a general argument against the prophecies, which is to be found in a book, written in the early part of the last century, which was cha-

racterised by no less a judge than Bishop Warburton, as “one of the most plausible books ever written, or likely to be written, against Christianity<sup>1</sup>.” As the works of that eminent and learned Prelate are in every body’s hands, this author may not have yet sunk into that oblivion, which it were desirable should be his fate; and his opinions may survive and be disseminated, when his name shall have been quite forgotten: it is fit, therefore, that their fallacy should be detected and exposed. His object was to shew, that as the New Testament professes to be founded upon the prophecies contained in the Old, and those prophecies are in general to be understood, not in a literal, but only in an allegorical or figurative sense; if that mode of interpretation were valid, Christianity would be firmly established, but if not, then it must be false<sup>2</sup>. And he then goes on rather to insinuate, than positively to assert, that *that* mode of interpretation is fanciful, illogical, and unsatisfactory.

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Collins on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion.

One of the principal instances which he selects to illustrate his argument, is that famous prediction of Isaiah, which at this period of the year is always so forcibly brought to our minds. *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* These words he contends in their obvious and literal sense, relate to a young woman in the days of Ahaz, King of Judah. And this he endeavours to prove from the context, and cites many weighty and respectable authorities<sup>1</sup> from amongst believers, in support of his opinion. It is true that we have some equally eminent writers<sup>2</sup>, who maintain, on the other hand, that the prediction did in its primary and literal sense refer to the Messiah. Perhaps an attentive consideration of the whole chapter and of the subsequent one, will at least leave a candid mind in doubt, whether this prophecy had not a double sense. And that it was accomplished in the first instance by the birth of a son to the prophet himself<sup>3</sup>: according to his own declaration. *Behold I and the children*

<sup>1</sup> Collins, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Prideaux and others.

<sup>3</sup> See Hey's Lectures, vol. i. p. 245.



*whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion :* and long afterwards, but in its far more important sense, by the birth of our Saviour.

But it is contended, not only that this and some other prophecies of the Old Testament, cited and said to have been fulfilled in the New, must be understood in a secondary and typical sense ; but a solitary instance is produced of one which “ does not expressly occur in any place of the Old Testament, and therefore (it is argued) cannot have been literally fulfilled <sup>1</sup>.” It is this from the second chapter of St. Matthew. *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth : that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene.* It is admitted that these words do not occur in any of the Prophets : but in the book of Judges it is said, the child shall be a Nazarite, alluding to Samson : and the book of Judges is placed by St. Jerome among the Prophets. If therefore St. Matthew applied these words to Christ, which were originally spoken concern-

<sup>1</sup> Collins, p. 47.

ing Samson, it must have been in a typical or secondary sense. Supposing therefore we concede to this Author for the sake of argument his premises, that there are in the New Testament, some predictions from the Old cited and applied to our Saviour, which can be so cited and applied only in a figurative and allegorical sense : we may still deny the validity of his conclusion, that Christianity must on that account be considered as false. And to maintain this position, we cannot take surer or better ground, than the declaration contained in the text : that Jesus did *expound to his disciples from Moses and all the Prophets, the things concerning himself*<sup>1</sup>. If we believe that assertion to be true, which every man who is really a Christian must necessarily do, we cannot doubt, that Jesus did accurately explain to the several writers of the Gospels, the manner in which the various predictions relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament, were accomplished by him : though they have in general contented themselves with simply stating the fact, without entering into particu-

<sup>1</sup> Fabricius (as quoted by Collins) says, Hic sermo ejus a multis non immerito anxie desideratus, et a *Lucâ fortasse auditus*, nusquam extat. p. 7.

lars, which, it never could have occurred to them, would be likely to become the subject of doubt or debate. For we shall probably see in the course of this discussion, why such difficulties as those which are founded upon double, secondary, or allegorical senses, could never have found a place in their minds, and ought not therefore to be suffered to exercise any influence over our's, at all prejudicial to our holy religion.

If we are asked, why we give implicit credit to the declaration, that Jesus did expound all these things to his disciples? Our answer is not difficult. We believe him on the ground of the miracles which he wrought: the very ground upon which *only* he uniformly claimed to be believed: and upon which the commentators generally rest the proof of his divinity. If again we are asked, what proof have we that the miracles were actually performed? Our answer is equally ready. The credibility of the historians of the Gospel: who profess to have been eye-witnesses of the facts which they relate: who appear to have had no imaginable motive for publishing what they knew to be false: and who must have maintained its truth at the constant hazard of their

lives. If such men are not to be credited, even when they bear witness to the performance of miracles; there is an end to all reliance upon human testimony: and universal scepticism is its necessary consequence.

But were their histories published at or about the time to which they have been referred: that is, *one* of them at least, within forty years after the events which they record had occurred: and are they now substantially what they were then? With respect to the last point it is only necessary to observe, that although the vigilance of collators has detected very numerous various readings in the different manuscripts, none have been found to affect any material fact or doctrine; and the same observation may be applied to the different versions which have been made of them<sup>1</sup>. With respect to the first point, we have the strongest evidence of which the nature of the case will admit. From the third century, when Eusebius wrote, there is no period at which the existence of the Gospels is not as

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, book i. chapters 8 and 9; and Bishop Tomline's Elements, vol. i. p. 13.

certain as it is at present<sup>1</sup>. The difficulty (if any) is in tracing them from thence upwards to the time of their publication. Yet this we are enabled to do, (if not so fully as could be wished, yet still satisfactorily) by what remains of a chain of writers, extending to Barnabas<sup>2</sup>, who was the companion of St. Paul.

It is true indeed, as Bishop Stillingfleet has remarked, that “antiquity is most defective in the time immediately after the Apostles<sup>3</sup>.” And this has not escaped the notice also of one who seldom omits any thing to the prejudice of Christianity. “The historical monuments of the three first centuries of ecclesiastical antiquity (says Gibbon) are neither very numerous; nor very prolix. From the end of the acts of the Apostles, to the time when the first apology of Justin Martyr was presented, there intervened a dark and doubtful period of four score years<sup>4</sup>.” What is intended to be insinuated here, I do not ex-

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. i. p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Irenicum, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> Vindication of some passages in chapters xv. and xvi. Miscellaneous Works, vol. ii. p. 597.

actly perceive. It cannot have been that the Gospels were forged at that time, because the difficulties involved in the supposition, of their having been forged *at any time* are infinitely greater, than any which can arise from the admission of their genuineness. For it cannot be disputed that the Christian religion commenced at that period ; nor that it originated with Jesus and his Apostles. Now this event was not of an ordinary kind, nor of slight importance. It is not credible but that some account must have been given of it. Yet there is no trace of any other account having ever existed, than that of which we are in possession <sup>1</sup>. Either, therefore, the authors of our present Gospels must have contrived not only to impose upon the world a fraudulent history of what were then very recent and very public transactions, and also to obliterate all memory, or records, (if there were any) of the real and genuine facts ; or chance must have assisted them in this last respect, in a manner surpassing belief. But the supposition of their having intentionally destroyed any authentic memorials of our

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. i. p. 115.

our Lord's life and doctrines, is utterly inconsistent with the character of their own narratives, which bear upon the face of them no marks of art or contrivance whatever; but are in every page of them conspicuous for qualities the very reverse of these. If then there remains no ground upon which the fidelity of the Evangelists as historians can be impeached, we must needs conclude that Jesus did (at the least) by the performance of miracles prove himself to have been divinely commissioned to reveal religious truth to mankind. Now this admission excludes all possibility of error being imputed to him. Whatever exposition therefore of the Scriptures of the Old Testament concerning himself he gave to his disciples, must have been infallibly true: whether we may be able at this time to ascertain what it was or not. He *may* have shewn their application to himself in a primary and literal sense, from Hebrew copies which no longer exist. And he *must* have been acquainted with the meaning of the original writings with a degree of accuracy, which none of their translators have probably ever possessed: as the differences in their translations sufficiently evince. Or he may have

explained them in a secondary or allegorical sense, according to some certain rules with which we are not acquainted : for the Jews are said to have had such rules of interpretation. This is noticed by an able writer in the beginning of the last century, Dr. Jenkin. He says, “ We may depend upon it, that the Apostles and other Disciples, who had such demonstrative evidence for the conviction of unbelievers, by a constant power of miracles, would never make use of any arguments to the Jews from the Old Testament but such as they well knew their adversaries could never be able to disprove or deny. For there were then certain methods of interpretation, as we learn from Josephus, which are now lost, and they disputed from acknowledged maxims and rules : the only difference and matter of dispute, was in the application of them to their particular case : however our ignorance of things, then generally known, may now make it difficult to reconcile some texts of the New Testament, with those of the Old from whence they were cited <sup>1</sup>.” One thing at

<sup>1</sup> The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion, vol. ii. p. 320.



least is clear, that Jesus expounded them in a manner that was satisfactory and convincing to his disciples, and ought not reasonably therefore to be otherwise to us. And upon that exposition was beyond all doubt founded the assertion of the Evangelists, that the different prophecies of the Old Testament did relate to and were fulfilled by him <sup>1</sup>.

Still as we must deal with the Scriptures as we have them, it is desirable to clear up as far as possible, whatever difficulties they may present to us. That the double sense of prophecy is one of them, cannot be dissembled. It appears not only to have furnished weapons to the enemies of Revelation: but even to have embarrassed some of its ablest defenders. Bishop Warburton censures Grotius in the strongest manner, for having "endeavoured throughout his whole comment on the Prophets, to find a double sense even in those direct prophecies which relate to Jesus: and to turn the primary sense upon the affairs of

<sup>1</sup> "The interpretations of obscure places of Scripture, which without question the Apostles taught the primitive Christians, are wholly lost; there remains no certainty scarce of any one."—Chillingworth's Religion of Protestants, &c. p. 50.

the Jewish dispensation<sup>1</sup>.” Yet he had himself just before admitted, that there were secondary senses in them. “Thus much I confess (he says) that without miracles in confirmation of such sense, some of them would with difficulty be proved to have it<sup>2</sup>.” Indeed, it seems impossible to doubt, that figurative senses and allegories were extremely common amongst the Jews, and pervaded the whole of their Scriptures. The late excellent Bishop Horne has illustrated this matter at great length, in his admirable commentary upon the Psalms; in which he has shewn, that there is hardly a verse, which does not relate primarily to David, and the circumstances of his time; and secondarily to Christ and the religion of the Gospel. And in very many instances, the latter seems to be the only sense, which can with any propriety be affixed to the words employed.

If any difficulty should still remain, in reconciling the fulfilment of the various prophecies relating to our Saviour, with the terms in

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

which they were delivered, it will probably be removed by considering, that they were fulfilled rather in their sense, than in their letter. This is laid down as a rule of interpretation by an eminent Biblical critic of the sixteenth century. "The Apostles and Evangelists (he says) in citing the testimony of Scripture, had regard to the sense, and not to the words: about which they were indeed not very solicitous, as they ought not to have been, since the truth consists, not in the words, but in the meaning<sup>1</sup>." If this be admitted (as I suppose it must be) it carries with it a most important consequence, and confirms my whole argument: that the application of the prophecies of the Old Testament to our Saviour, rests entirely upon his own authority, as transmitted to us by the Evangelist in the words of the text. For if prophecies which were dictated by the Spirit of God, are to be understood otherwise than literally; none but those who are endued with the same spirit, can with certainty determine their meaning: which is what I understand by these words of

<sup>1</sup> Drusius in the *Critici Sacri*.

St. Peter: *that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

Enough, I trust has been said to shew, that *that* dilemma which would reduce us to choose between a primary and literal sense, which cannot always be found; and a secondary and allegorical one which cannot be supported, has absolutely no foundation. That the Jews from the prophecies of the Old Testament looked for the Messiah cannot be disputed, for they look for him still. That Jesus Christ came and claimed to be *that* Messiah, and by miracles proved himself to have been divinely commissioned, and therefore to be entitled to absolute belief, we learn from the New Testament, whose authenticity is established by the same kind of evidence as that of any other ancient book, though much more abundant in quantity. The New Testament is to *us* the true key to the Old. “The most decisive proof (said the late learned Bishop of Winchester) of the authenticity and inspiration of the ancient Scriptures, is

derived from the New Testament<sup>1</sup>." The Christian religion throws light upon the Jewish history, during a period of four thousand years, and accords with it down to the present hour. It gives a meaning to many of their otherwise inexplicable institutions. It explains rationally and satisfactorily a great mass of very obscure predictions. Now I would ask, did it do all this without any foundation in truth; were all its alleged accomplishments of prophecy, mere fanciful accommodations of unconnected events: would it not be more wonderful than any thing which it calls upon us to believe? For upon our supposition, all that is miraculous in the Scriptures is the work of God, and for a sufficient and good purpose: but upon the contrary hypothesis, it is a most marvellous contrivance of men, and either for a bad purpose, or for no purpose at all. Between these two alternatives, as our choice has been long made, so may it long continue firm and unshaken! And may we by a frequent perusal of, and

<sup>1</sup> Elements of Christian Theology, vol. i. p. 19. Hey's Lectures, vol. i. p. 195.

diligent meditation upon the Holy Scriptures, in a sober frame of mind ; unwarped by bigotry, and untinged with fanaticism ; daily encrease in faith, in hope, and in charity : and with the aid of Divine grace, enrich our minds with that knowledge, which alone can make us *wise unto salvation*.

## SERMON VIII.

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JOHN ii. 11.

*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory ; and his disciples believed on him.*

THE services of our Church from advent till this time, naturally direct our minds to the consideration of the various prophecies, which had not only taught the Jews, but through them other surrounding nations also, to expect the appearance in the world of a very extraordinary person, who should effect a great change in human affairs, and particularly with regard to religion. Accordingly, I have lately dwelt very much upon various topics, whose object has been to shew, that the argument in favour of Christianity from prophecy, is valid and conclusive : and is not liable to those objections, which have been

sometimes urged against it. We have since commemorated the birth of him, by whom we believe the predictions of the Old Testament were accomplished. And the Gospel for this day, from which I have taken my text, contains the ground upon which, and upon which *only*, we can be justified in retaining that belief. For it would not have been sufficient, that the time and place and circumstances of his birth should have corresponded with the general expectation, had he not been himself able to give further and decisive proof of his Messiahship. For as the mission of our Saviour was foretold by numerous prophecies, so was it established by numerous miracles—nay more, some of those very predictions could not without miracles have been completed. How otherwise could he have *opened the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf; and made the dumb to sing, and the lame to leap as an hart?* If we ourselves were witnesses of such things as these, we must inevitably confess their Author to have superhuman power, and if they were done for a good purpose, we must also acknowledge that power to be divine, or at the least divinely commissioned.



The only question therefore will be, whether in point of fact, they were or were not performed? Now the Bible professes to contain two Revelations of religious truths to the world from the Almighty, or perhaps we should say, one Revelation consisting of two parts, the one preparatory, the other final, and both of them attested by the performance of miracles. If we assume the miracles to be true, it will follow that the religion founded upon them was true also. If we believe the religion to have been a Divine Revelation, we cannot doubt that the miracles were really performed. If therefore either of those propositions can be proved, it will establish every thing of which it concerns us to be convinced, upon those most momentous subjects. But I conceive that both of them admit of such proof as we may rely upon with perfect confidence.

With respect to miracles, every thing we see and do, is to us in one sense really miraculous. We can no more trace or comprehend the mode of their operation, than we can penetrate that of the first great Cause of all things. But by a miracle we mean only what is not according to common experience in any part

of the globe, so far as we can ascertain it, but directly contrary to it : such as raising the dead to life, controlling the elements, and many others. Certainly we cannot be expected to believe these to have been done upon light grounds or for trivial purposes. But if an adequate motive can be assigned for them, and strong grounds can be alleged in their support : there is no reason why we should refuse them our belief. Now this applies completely both to the miracles of Moses and of Christ. If to be informed of the nature and attributes of God, of the purposes of our own being, and whether that being is to end here or to be renewed hereafter ; if these be objects of great moment to us, yet not discoverable but by Divine Revelation : and if Divine Revelation can only be manifested by the performance of miracles, surely we have assigned a sufficient motive for them. And if the fact of their performance be certified by the senses of very numerous witnesses, and were indeed matter of the greatest publicity, and corroborated by national monuments and commemorative institutions, commencing at the time, and continued to the present hour, we cannot reasonably enter-

tain any doubts upon that point<sup>1</sup>. But that true religion is of the highest moment to us, yet that it never *has* existed *any where*, nor *does yet exist*, if not in the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations, cannot be disputed: nor has any one yet been able to conceive any mode not miraculous, by which a communication from heaven can be made to mankind. And since the miracles of Moses were submitted to the senses of great multitudes of people, in fact to the whole of the then generation of the Jews; and were commemorated by the whole body of their civil laws, and religious rites and ceremonies, their yearly passover, their weekly sabbath, their new moons, and all their feasts, fasts, and ordinances; which have continued down to the present day; and since the very same things may be affirmed of the miracles of Christ, that they were *not done in a corner*, but in the presence of multitudes, reported by eye-witnesses, and confirmed by contemporaneous institutions; such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper; in short—by the whole Christian religion, which then commenced, and

<sup>1</sup> See Leslie on Deism for this argument at length.

subsists at this moment : we have every reason which the nature of the case admits, to establish the probability of the performance of the miracles.

Again, that the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations were not *of men but of God*, I take to be clear from their internal evidence, independent of their external proofs. Not to enter more than is necessary into their respective doctrines, I will appeal but to *one* from each of them in confirmation of this point. That Moses first taught the unity, the eternity, and the spirituality of the Deity cannot be disputed. That the notions of the heathen world in general upon this subject, on the contrary, were polytheistical, absurd, and contemptible, cannot be denied. And if a few philosophers made any approach to the truth upon this point, there is every reason to think that their conjectures (for they were nothing else) must be traced to a Jewish original. In like manner the Christian Doctrine of a future state, with its rewards and punishments, founded upon Christian ideas of virtue and vice, was absolutely unknown to the Pagan world, and but imperfectly understood

in the latter part of the Jewish history. I know that in modern times many able Christian writers have endeavoured to prove the unity, and the attributes of God, and the doctrine of a future state by arguments drawn (as they suppose) from their own minds : such as the necessity for a first cause, the unity of design in the works of creation, the laws of matter and motion, the irregularities in human affairs and many others. But (as I lately had occasion to observe) I am persuaded that in all this, they have mistaken the light of Revelation for the light of reason, and have been more indebted than they themselves were aware of, to the doctrines and the influence of Christianity. And that upon their own principles *merely*, there is not one of their arguments that is not liable to serious objections. In our total ignorance of the manner of existence, of that Being, whom we call the first cause, (which all those writers fully admit) how *can* we conclude with certainty, that there is *but one* such Being ? And unable as we are from reason to account for the existence of so much evil in the world, (which they also admit) how can we solidly refute the

Manichean notion of two independent principles, the one of good, and the other of evil<sup>1</sup>? And with respect to a future state, why should we suppose that our arguments in favour of it, built upon reason *only*, are more conclusive than were those of the most celebrated ancient, and we may add, modern philosophers, which evidently produced no permanent conviction even upon their own minds? For I fear that this doctrine even *now* seldom forms any part of the creed of a Deist. Because if he really believes it, and is possessed of a mind of only ordinary intelligence and candour, it must go far towards making him a Christian. But his real impediment to its reception, arises from his not forming correct ideas of the nature and attributes of that Divine Being, in whose existence he professes to believe. How this can be done, but by the help of those intimations respecting himself, which he has afforded us in the Sacred Volume, it is impossible for any man to say. *Canst thou* (says Zophar to Job) *by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* If then these doc-

<sup>1</sup> Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. vol. i. p. 239—245.

trines are clearly not of human invention, and cannot be proved by any arguments drawn from reason only; we must conclude that they are, as the Scriptures clearly shew, of Divine original; and we must firmly believe in them, as resting upon Divine authority. And we must consider that authority to have been established by the performance of miracles.

The necessity for this species of evidence is so apparent, that I am not aware of any description of Christians who reject it: not even those, who by denying the Divinity of our Saviour and his atonement, reduce Christianity within the narrowest possible limits: making it to consist only of the doctrine of a future state. The objection to miracles proceeds from a different quarter. From those who believe in no Revelation whatever. And who so far from allowing them to be a proof of religion, treat them as decisive marks of imposture. Yet confident as their tone is, it is but feebly supported by their arguments; which amount to little more than this assertion of Mr. Hume, that no human testimony can render a miracle credible, because "it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that

testimony should be false<sup>1</sup>." I take this because it is the main argument relied upon by modern infidels : and if it can be refuted therefore, leaves nothing to apprehend upon that ground. Yet its weakness is so apparent, that nothing but the Author's great reputation as a writer upon other subjects, could have gained it the attention it has received. For what is it to object to a miracle that it is contrary to experience, but to say that a miracle is a miracle ? What constitutes a miracle, but its being contrary to general or ordinary experience ? If it is meant to say, that it is contrary to *universal* experience, that is to assume the point in discussion, to take for granted the fact to be proved, and not to shew the insufficiency of the proposed medium of proof, namely, human testimony. Yet this is the only way of assailing the miracles with success, by shewing the incompetency of the witnesses, either from ignorance of what they reported, or from wilful falsehood in reporting it. But this would have been a task so full of difficulty, and so unlikely to lead to the desired conclu-

<sup>1</sup> This is truly stated by Paley to be Mr. Hume's principle, though he has not expressed it precisely in these terms. Evidences, vol. i. p. 6.



sion, that it is no wonder that Mr. Hume, who appears to have been a very impatient, and irritable reasoner upon such subjects, should have preferred a shorter though by no means a surer road to his object. For when he contends that no human testimony can render a miracle credible, he denies in effect that God can work a miracle, or at the very least, he assumes either that he never has, or never will do so. That is, he assumes the whole question in dispute<sup>1</sup>. For surely, if a man born blind, should be suddenly enabled to see, at the mere word of another ; he would be a competent and a credible witness of that fact. Or if five thousand men should be fed with a few loaves, and the fragments left should greatly exceed in quantity the whole of the original supply, they would be capable of verifying such a transaction in a satisfactory manner. There is then absolutely nothing in the first part of this famous argument, that it is contrary to experience that miracles should be true.

Nor is there more in the latter part of it,

<sup>1</sup> See Campbell's Solid Refutation of Hume's Essay on Miracles.

that it is not contrary to experience, that testimony should be false. No one pretends to deny this position. But to what purpose is it introduced here, and what bearing has it upon the question? Must it not equally be allowed that it is also frequently true? That our knowledge of every fact whatever, not submitted to our own senses, depends upon it? And that we might refuse to believe every other history, ancient or modern, as well as that of our Lord's miracles, upon the ground that human testimony may possibly deceive us? Except then it can be shewn, not that the accounts of the Evangelists *may* be untrue, but that in point of fact they *are* so, our belief in them ought in no degree to be shaken, by the celebrated argument under our consideration.

It is curious to see how differently this matter was viewed by the unbelievers of our Lord's time: from amongst whom we should naturally look for the strongest objections, which could be urged against the performance of the miracles. For surely it cannot be pretended that the Evangelists have suppressed any unfavourable declarations of this kind. Have they not, on the contrary, brought forward every imputation, however discreditable,

which the enemies of our Lord could suggest against him : and recorded every transaction, however disgraceful in which his disciples were concerned ? Have they scrupled to confess that some of the Jews, thought our Saviour *had a devil and was mad* ? that others spoke of him as a *deceiver* ? and that at length they generally accused him of *blasphemy*, and put him to death upon that charge : insulting and deriding his pretensions to the last moment of his existence ? And with respect to his disciples, have they attempted to conceal their want of faith in him ? Have they hesitated to expose the shameful conduct of Peter in denying him : the infamy of Judas in betraying him : and finally, their cowardly desertion of him, when they *all forsook him and fled* ? Under these circumstances is it at all likely, or is it even credible, that if the Jews *had* disputed the performance of his miracles, we should not have heard of it from those, who evidently appear to have had no disposition to keep back any thing, however unfavourable to the cause which they undertook to defend ? Yet what is the fact ? Are we told that the miracles were doubted or denied in our Saviour's time ? Nothing like

it. Does it appear that they were overlooked, and, therefore, that the silence of the Evangelists upon the point, concludes nothing either one way or the other? So far from it—we find that as to *one* description of them, an objection *was* raised; but such an objection, as contains an express admission of the fact of their performance: and almost an implied acknowledgment of the reality of the rest. For they who could impute our Saviour's casting out devils, to the assistance of the *prince of the devils*, would hardly have been backward in controverting his other miracles, if they could have found any plausible pretext for so doing. But they have not done so. And their omitting so to do, is almost equal to the testimony of unwilling witnesses: confirming the truth of *that* which they were most anxious to discredit.

That the Christian religion was originally established upon the belief of the miracles of its Author, is beyond all dispute. It has now subsisted upwards of eighteen centuries, in defiance of open enemies, and of injudicious, and even of *injurious* friends; (for its most dangerous foes are those, who professing to

believe it, do by their lives and conduct, plainly shew their profession to be insincere :) and it is now much too late to expect, that it can be overthrown by an abstract argument of a philosopher, especially of so feeble a texture, as that which we have been examining.

There are those who think that discussions of this kind, upon the evidences of our faith, are unnecessary in assemblies of Christians, who may be presumed to have made up their minds upon the subject: and to entertain none of the doubts which I have endeavoured to remove. But I am of a very different opinion; or I should not have brought such topics, so frequently under your consideration, as I have done. I think the truth of Christianity in general, that is, of those points upon which all Christians are agreed; of far more importance, than any of those particular doctrines upon which they are divided. And I am persuaded, that the most powerful inducement to the practice of Christian virtues, will be found in the belief of the Divine Authority of him, who has enjoined them. Now can it be doubted that in any Christian

congregation, there may be believers of every shade and degree <sup>1</sup>, and even by chance some who do not believe at all. If this *may* be so—surely these are the persons, whom the spirit of the Gospel, and the analogy of Apostolical preaching, equally point out to us as those, to whom our efforts should be principally directed. These are like *the lost sheep of the House of Israel*, to whom our Saviour was expressly *sent*. Or those, upon whose repentance, the *angels in heaven* are described as *rejoicing*. These are such as they, for whose conversion St. Paul laboured so earnestly and incessantly, as to have given ground from the first for the opinion, that he thought faith every thing, and virtue nothing : though nothing *can* be more contrary to his doctrines, when they are fully and fairly examined.

But suppose that I am addressing no persons of this description : none who profess to have any doubts and much less any disbelief of Christianity. Am I to conclude also, that their *lives* are passed in exact conformity to

<sup>1</sup> “As opinion, so faith admits degrees; and that as there may be a strong and weak opinion, so there may be a strong and weak faith.” Chillingworth’s religion of Protestants, p. 31.

Christian principles? That the fear of God, and the love of their fellow-creatures, are the two great rules, which govern their whole conduct? That they regard their present existence only as a state of probation for another? That they are therefore in all things temperate in themselves, and charitable to others? That they *visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep themselves unspotted from the world.* That they make some approach at least, to that *holiness without which* (we are assured) *none shall see the Lord:* and are sincerely desirous to *adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.* If such be really their condition, if they have indeed *thus a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men:* I admit, that their faith may be so well founded, as to require no arguments for its confirmation. But if their lives fall far short of this standard: if the precepts of the Gospel are not the sole rules of their conduct: I fear that their faith in the Gospel is not quite so firm and undoubting, as they perhaps persuade themselves it is. For it is extremely difficult to conceive, that any man can really have the mind of a Christian, and act from motives

which can have no place in a mind, enlightened and influenced by Christian principles.— *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.* So reasoned our Saviour with the Jews, when they imputed one species of his miracles to demoniacal agency. And it is equally applicable to our present purpose.— If a man's faith be sound and good, it will necessarily produce only good works. If it be altogether unproductive of good works, or fruitful only of evil ones; it must be either a barren or a corrupt faith: and demands incessant vigilance and diligence, to restore it to a state of health and purity.

What then is the conclusion of the matter, but that as Jesus by his miracles *manifested forth his glory*, so that *his disciples believed on him*: so should we also upon the very same ground, repose implicit confidence in all his declarations, and yield a cheerful obedience to all his commandments. Not that the belief in the performance of miracles, presents no difficulties to a candid and enquiring, however religious mind; but that the difficulties on the other hand, in refusing to be-



lieve them are infinitely greater : and that whilst the latter may lead to very serious consequences, the former must be at least harmless, if not eminently beneficial. The Christian religion *exists*, and has *long existed*. No other explanation of its origin has ever been attempted, than that which the Gospels afford ; namely, the miracles of its Founder. On *them alone*, he rested the truth of his pretensions ; and on *them* we may safely rely for the foundation of our faith, the assurance of our hope ; and the reward of that charity, which comprehends in itself every Christian grace and virtue, and can alone ensure our final salvation.

## SERMON IX.

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MATTHEW xi. 5.

*The Poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

It appears at first sight rather remarkable, that our Saviour after alleging his miracles as proofs of his Messiahship to the disciples of the Baptist, should add these words: which do not immediately strike us as affording any peculiar evidence of that fact. But there can be no doubt that he referred to this prediction of Isaiah, which not at that moment only, but throughout the whole course of his ministry he was anxious to fulfil. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me: because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek,* (that is unto the poor, it is the same word in the original, which is sometimes translated poor and sometimes meek); *he hath*

*sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. That he considered this passage as applicable to his office, is confirmed by St. Luke, who relates that he read it in the synagogue—and that the eyes of all who were present were fastened upon him, and that he declared this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

There is nothing that more strongly distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, than this circumstance, that it was preached to the poor; that their welfare temporal and eternal formed so considerable a part of it: that they were not only the objects peculiarly benefited by it, but were also the chosen instruments of its propagation in the world. There is every reason to think from the general tenor of the Gospel, that the neglect and contempt, and even the oppression of the poor, were very prevalent vices amongst the higher classes of the Jews. St. James in his Epistle to the twelve Tribes scattered abroad thus addresses them: *Hearken my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But*

*ye have despised the poor* : addressing whom he says—*Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seat? Do they not blaspheme that worthy Name by the which ye are called?* This solicitude for the poor might then (independent of the prophecy) be a reason why the Baptist who had called so earnestly upon his countrymen to repent, and to practise mutual charity, should believe that Jesus was the expected Messiah. From its first introduction to the present hour it has formed a most important part of Christianity. It has grown with its growth and strengthened with its strength. It has subsisted under all the various circumstances in which the religion has been placed. Ardent and enthusiastic but perhaps injudicious and impracticable in its infancy; beneficial even in the period of its greatest corruption; more enlightened as brighter days shone upon it, and gradually advancing and improving in its spirit and character, as the genuine doctrines of the Gospel were more clearly developed and understood. The community of goods which undoubtedly to some extent and for a short time subsisted in the church, is a strong proof of the deep root which the benevolent maxims

of our Saviour had taken in the minds of the first converts. Nor did they cease to operate extensively during the best ages of the church. It is admitted by an author to whom I have lately had frequent occasion to refer, and who if he had been as unprejudiced, as he was diligent, in his investigation into the history of Christianity, would probably have been numbered amongst its believers, that "a generous intercourse of charity united the most distant provinces, and the smaller congregations were cheerfully assisted by the alms of their more opulent brethren. Such an institution (he adds) which paid less regard to the merit than to the distress of the object, very materially conduced to the progress of Christianity<sup>1</sup>." In a subsequent period, when for many ages the church was debased by the grossest superstition, the same author observes, that "Monastic principles and institutions counterbalanced all its temporal advantages." But even at this time it cannot be affirmed that the neglect of the poor was one of their vices. On the contrary, we have reason to think that by a pernicious liberality, they encouraged

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, c. xv.

them in those habits of idleness, which afterwards contributed to lay the foundation of a system for their support, the policy and utility of which, is to this hour a subject of doubt and debate. But however this may be determined, looking at it only in a religious point of view ; we may safely say, that the provision for the poor established in the reign of Elizabeth and her predecessors, was worthy of the era of the reformation. It was worthy of the enlightened and rational principles which then prevailed, to take care that numbers, whose means of subsistence were cut off or diminished by the changes which then took place, should be fully secured from want and misery. From that time to the present, as religious knowledge has been gaining ground amongst us, so have its genuine fruits been multiplied and distributed. To sustenance for the bodies of the poor, has been added instruction for their minds : which from small beginnings has at length attained a magnitude, whose force it would be impossible to check, whatever may be its consequences. Its progress therefore will require unceasing vigilance and attention. To convert it into a real blessing to themselves and the community, they must be taught

above all things to believe in *him*, and to obey *his* precepts, to whom they are indebted for all these advantages. For the Founder of Christianity, has been unquestionably the source of all the amelioration, which the condition of the poor has received since its introduction. For “with the Edicts of the first Christian Emperor (as the learned commentator upon our laws has noticed) commenced those legal provisions for their welfare, which have subsequently been so much extended and improved.” So that the temporal benefits which have accrued to the poor, from the Gospel’s having been preached not only *to* but *for* them, are really incalculable, and may be almost considered to be proof<sup>1</sup> of its Divine origin, and should therefore attach them to the faith and precepts of its Author, by the strongest sentiments of gratitude and devotion.

But it was not only in this primary sense of the word that the Gospel was preached to the poor. It was also peculiarly addressed to

<sup>1</sup> “That the poor had the Gospel preached to them; Christ makes a *mark* as well as business of his Mission.” Locke’s Reasonableness of Christianity. Works, vol. ii. 541.

another class of persons under that denomination, who may or may not be in indigent circumstances. Our Lord thus commences his admirable Sermon upon the Mount—*Blessed are the poor in spirit—for their's is the kingdom of heaven.* Surely there was something in this declaration very characteristic of him, who (we are told) *spake as never man spake.* It argued a deeper insight into the principles of the human heart, than any philosophy before or since has attained. It discovered in it an union of qualities the most opposite, and seemingly incompatible. Of the most heroic courage and fortitude, with the utmost meekness, patience, and forbearance. Of the loftiest ambition, that of reaching heaven itself, with the deepest self-abasement, and humility. That it might be excited to the voluntary surrender of all that this life has to bestow, by the prospect of another to be enjoyed after death. That our Lord's Divine wisdom should have enabled him to see this, and to erect upon its foundation a system of religion correspondent to it, is not wonderful. But that such a conception should have entered into the mind of a mere man, was certainly not to have been expected, from



any previous experience of human principles and conduct. Yet upon this was Christianity undoubtedly established. These were the elements, out of which the first Christians were formed. Those who having themselves cheerfully embraced the Gospel, went forth armed with the most indomitable courage on the one hand and the most unresisting meekness on the other, to impart its blessings to the world both by precept and example.— These were they who asserted its truth at the hazard of their lives, and sealed it with their blood. Who could receive the bitterest insults without resentment, and endure the cruellest torments without complaint. It is happily *long* since, in *this* country at least, the courage of Christians has been put to so severe a test as this. But that disposition of mind which called forth our Saviour's blessing upon the poor in spirit, is still most essential to the formation of the real Christian character. It shews itself in that docility which is both willing and anxious to receive instruction in religious knowledge, from the only source whence it can be derived, the volume of inspiration. It is marked by that humility which is directly opposed to that pride of in-

tellect, which more than any other cause engenders infidelity. It keeps in subjection, or we should rather say, it is inconsistent with the indulgence of those violent and irregular passions, which it is one great object of our religion to check and subdue. It is perhaps above all displayed in that patient resignation under the trying calamities of life, of which our Saviour himself has left to all his followers the most perfect and signal example.—Wherever these qualities are found, we recognize those whom our Saviour described as the poor in spirit. In proportion as they are united and abound, we discover the true primitive Christian temper; and probably it is upon this account, that it is so frequently displayed in an eminent degree in that sex, to whom the virtues we have been enumerating are so peculiarly congenial. For this character is formed by the combination of those virtues, which respectively distinguish the two sexes. And it should seem that one great end of that union in which God has ordained them to live, is the cultivation of that mixed disposition of heart and mind, which results from mutually imitating whatsoever is most commendable in each, and correcting that which

is most deserving of blame. Hence we should naturally expect to find in the fathers and mothers of families, the best patterns of *that* character upon which our Saviour pronounced his first blessing, and I should hope that this reasonable expectation is not often disappointed.

But not only was the Gospel preached especially to the poor in every sense of that term, but also from that class of persons were selected those, who were commissioned to spread it abroad amongst all nations. And here again we cannot fail to perceive the total want of resemblance between this proceeding, and the usual course of human transactions. That a few humble fishermen of Galilee should have been appointed to effect an important change in the religion of their own country, and totally to subvert that of all their surrounding powerful neighbours, even of that proud people by whom they themselves were held in subjection, to this hour excites our utmost astonishment. And their success (such as it was) upon any merely human principles is utterly inexplicable. No adequate solution has yet been given of it, but that which the Scriptures afford. That super-

natural assistance was imparted to the Apostles, and that in their preaching, *the Lord was working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*

In political affairs remarkable changes have usually been effected by persons in the higher ranks of life ; by the timely display of great talents for war or government, which have enabled them to exercise great influence over their fellow-creatures. But so far from the Apostles having had any assistance of this kind, all *such* power was every where arrayed against them. And if they and their immediate successors ultimately succeeded in establishing the dominion of the Gospel over the minds of the rulers of the earth, it was not by inculcating resistance but submission to their temporal authority, and carefully distinguishing between the obedience due unto God, and that which may lawfully be paid unto men. Nevertheless their progress was in the order which might naturally be expected. There was nothing in their doctrines calculated to make an immediate and strong impression upon the superior classes of society. On the contrary the unwillingness to receive instruction from those whom they regarded as so

much inferior to themselves, must have formed no inconsiderable obstacle to their success.— Accordingly we are not at all surprised when we find St. Paul telling the Corinthians, that *not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called; but that God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.* Had the celebrated historian to whom I have already adverted considered this passage, and the true spirit of the Christian Dispensation, he would probably have expressed less surprise and concern than he has done, that it was overlooked or rejected by Seneca, the Plinies, Tacitus, and the other sages whom he enumerates<sup>1</sup>. He would have perceived that they were amongst the very *last* persons, who were likely to be attracted by the simplicity of the Gospel, and the unassuming though original and striking character of its preachers. He might naturally have accounted for the effects of *their* philosophical prejudices, only by reflecting more deeply and candidly upon *his own*. It is with much more justice that

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, c. xv.

he comments upon what was actually achieved by such apparently inadequate instruments, when he observes, that “the lower we depress the temporal condition of the first Christians, the more reason we shall find to admire their merit and success<sup>1</sup>.” We may judge by the writings and actions of St. Paul alone, with what ardour and energy the preaching of the Gospel was conducted by himself and the other Apostles. Could any merely human object have stimulated such men to such exertions and sacrifices as they made and endured? Yet they had absolutely no *human* objects whatever. Their avowed motives and their real purposes must have been the same. There is no room for any intermediate supposition. What but the workings of a mind intensely agitated by the contemplation of Divine things, could have produced such expressions as these? *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. And again—Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do,*

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, c. xv.

*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. And what an entire devotion of himself to the great work in which he was engaged is apparent in these words! And now behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.*

Such was the man who with reference to this great undertaking, describes himself as *poor yet making many rich*. What was the nature of that Gospel then, as it more particularly regarded those persons, to whom our Lord in the text declared it was preached? In what sense could it be said to make them rich? The answer is obvious. It made them rich in the knowledge of religious truth. If they were Jews, it improved and corrected their notions of the nature and attributes of

God, and of his providential dealings with his creatures. If they were Gentiles, it illuminated their minds upon those awful subjects, of which till then they had remained in total darkness. To the former it superadded to their belief of the unity of God, that of his mysterious junction with the Son and the Holy Ghost, in whose name they were thenceforth to be baptized. It instructed them in the doctrine of the Atonement of our Saviour, for that guilt and depravity which they had derived from Adam, or had personally incurred and committed ; and thereby laid a clear foundation for that repentance, which they were called upon to testify as preliminary to their reception of the Gospel. It confirmed them in that expectation of a future state of retribution, which from the writings of their latter prophets, was then dawning upon them, but had not yet attained its meridian splendour. These things, which to the Jews were additions to their stock of religious knowledge, were to the Gentiles absolute novelties ; the very wisest of whom had hitherto been in complete ignorance upon these points. Yet it was found to be an easier task to eradicate their inveterate prejudices, than to engraft



upon the truth of the Mosaic dispensation, the more perfect fruit of the Gospel Revelation. Nor is this at all surprising. On the contrary, it consists with our uniform experience, that the more palpable an error is, the more readily it may be detected and cured : whilst in proportion as it approaches to truth, the more difficult it becomes to mark with precision, the point of its deviation from it. These leading doctrines, as they were delivered both to the Jews and the Gentiles, were common to the rich and the poor, and equally concerned both those descriptions of persons.

But the Gospel had other points of great moment, which were peculiarly adapted to each of them. The latter, as by far the more numerous portion of mankind, seem to be the especial objects of its care. To reconcile them to the apparent hardships of their present condition, to point out to them in what way they may turn them to their future advantage, to console them with the assurance of being rewarded hereafter for whatever sufferings they may endure here, provided they endure them with patience, and practise such other virtues as their circumstances will enable them to do ; these appear to be the great ends of our

Saviour's preaching as *to them*. Nor were these ends unworthy of being accomplished even by Divine interposition. For what is the language of him to whom I have so often alluded? "It is incumbent on us diligently to remember, that the kingdom of heaven was promised to the poor in spirit, and that minds afflicted by calamity and the contempt of mankind, cheerfully listen to the Divine promise of future happiness; while, on the contrary, the fortunate are satisfied with the possession of this world; and the wise abuse in doubt and dispute their vain superiority of reason and knowledge<sup>1</sup>." It is not for us to say, whether more is meant here than is expressed. I would charitably hope that he does not intend to include *himself* amongst those fortunate and wise persons, to whom he ascribes such cold, unfeeling, and irrational sentiments and conduct as these. But if *such are* to be considered the general, or the frequent attendants upon wealth and wisdom, *then* indeed have the poor and the simple reason to rejoice in their lot, *then* indeed is it evident that the Gospel is preached to *them*

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, c. xv.

under peculiar advantages, then is it *demonstrated* that the kingdom of heaven is of easier acquisition to *them*, than to their more opulent and intellectual brethren.

The last object of our Lord's preaching, as it especially regarded the poor, which remains to be noticed, was to secure them an interest in the hearts of the affluent, for the mitigation of the various sufferings to which they are exposed. This he has done, by appealing in the most irresistible manner to their feelings of compassion for *others*, and to their most lively sensations of hope or fear for *themselves*. Who can forget these affecting words? When, at the last day, the Son of Man shall have set the good on his right hand, and the wicked on his left, *then shall he say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?*

*or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? Then shall he answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.—Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

I will not weaken the impression, which this passage is so well calculated to make, by

many more words of my own. What arguments can hope to convince *him*, who is unmoved by such an appeal as this? *That* Gospel, which brought *good tidings* to the poor, has assuredly also brought *bad tidings* to the rich, if they neglect those for whom it displays so much solicitude. But I trust that better feelings than that of fear, will lead us to adopt our Lord's benevolent and charitable maxims. And not to adopt them in theory only, but also to reduce them to practice. If ever there was a period when this was more urgently required than another, it has been that which this country has of late years witnessed. If ever our Christian faith should be clearly manifested by our conduct, it is when the calls upon our compassion are so loud and so appalling as they still too frequently are. It is now especially incumbent upon us to remember our Saviour's declaration, that *by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*: and to be assured, that *that* Gospel which exhibits throughout, so much concern for the welfare of the poor, will never be the Gospel of salvation to those, who coldly, and cruelly, regard their sufferings with indifference: and

either from avarice or prodigality, are unfaithful stewards of that wealth, which God has entrusted to them for the especial purpose of proving their faith in his Son, and their obedience to his most express and often repeated commandments.

## SERMON X.

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MARK X. 24.

*And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*

IN my last discourse, I endeavoured to point out the peculiar advantages, which the preaching of the Gospel was designed to bring to the poor, and which *have* in fact, in a great degree resulted to them from it. I have now to enter upon a less pleasing theme, to exhibit in some measure the reverse of the former picture—to describe the dangers which the same Gospel declares to be attendant upon riches, and to establish the same conclusion from both these premises: that the real happiness of all classes of Christians, both here and hereafter, can only be secured by a practical, and conscien-

tious adherence to the doctrines of our Saviour upon these important topics, for the application of which, we have almost daily and hourly opportunity. In discussing this subject, it will be difficult to avoid making some observations, which may not be agreeable to all who may hear them. This I should be sincerely disposed at all times to lament. But the paramount duty of this place, above all others, is to declare the truth. We are not (to use the words of Isaiah) to *speak smooth things, to prophesy deceits*. Nor are we on the other hand to forget, that we are as much the subjects of our own exhortations, as any of those whom we address. And if we suffer any unguarded expressions or exaggerated statements to escape from us, they will not only fall unprofitably upon our hearers, but recoil with severity upon ourselves. But we have at least the consolation of knowing, that whatever we utter must be understood as spoken generally. For as we seldom can have the means of applying it personally, so I trust we have never the inclination to do so. If it should happen that *none* are present, to whom what I shall have to offer has any immediate reference, none who stand in need of such



cautions, as the text must naturally suggest; they will have great reason to rejoice in such their happy condition. But if on the other hand (as I fear is too probable) there should be *many* here, who are conscious that our Saviour's reflection touches them nearly, that they do indeed trust too much in their riches, and are too little solicitous about making that use of them, which both reason and religion require: I am sure they will receive such observations as it will be my duty to make, with a true Christian temper, with charitable indulgence, even if they should appear to be not fully warranted by a sound and reasonable interpretation of Scripture, but with a firm resolution to act upon them if they are.

Called upon as we are *at this time* by the highest authority in this kingdom, to urge all persons to a more than usual exertion of their liberality, for the relief of the almost unprecedented distresses of large portions of their fellow-subjects, and required as we are at all times, as faithful ministers of the Gospel, to stimulate the rich to the due performance of this their peculiar duty, I have still felt it necessary to premise these few remarks, both on account of the delicacy, as well as the

difficulty of the subject. It is a matter of great delicacy, to appear to suppose that any who are present can need to be reminded of their duty in this respect, and warned of the consequences of neglecting it. It is still more so, to be thought to urge any persons to go beyond what their ability will fairly enable them to perform. But it is no breach of propriety, strenuously to exhort the rich, to a cheerful and ample discharge of the obligations, imposed upon them by their affluent condition. It is, on the contrary, imperative upon us, even for their *own sakes*, still more than for those of the indigent, to lay the matter before them in all its plenitude of interest, to exhibit it in every point of view of which it is susceptible, to shew its reasonableness and necessity, and to persuade men to attend to it, both by the display of the glorious rewards annexed to their obedience, and the dreadful punishment denounced against their neglect of it.

But the subject is not only one of delicacy, but also of considerable difficulty. And this arises from the strong and unqualified terms, in which it is set forth in Scripture: which have (I apprehend) frequently operated, rather

to diminish than encrease that beneficence, which they are designed to excite (when properly understood) in the highest practicable degree. Precepts so apparently unreasonable as some of them are, may have been thought to have no serious obligation. I grant that some of them as applied to ourselves, must be understood with much limitation, as requiring to be obeyed rather in their spirit, than in their letter. When our Saviour charged *a certain ruler to sell all that he had, and distribute to the poor, and that he should have treasure in heaven*—he added these words—*and come follow me*. Conduct which under such circumstances would be manifestly proper and practicable, in the totally different circumstances in which we are placed, would be quite the reverse: and can only be proposed for our imitation, with a due regard to our actual condition. Almost all our Saviour's rules are expressed in the strongest terms, and possibly he contemplated the existence of a state of society, when they might be all strictly obeyed, and when the exact performance of some of them would facilitate that of the rest. But we are at present far from such a state of things, and must content

ourselves with humble approaches towards that Christian perfection, of which we must still fall miserably short. But because the literal sense of our Saviour's injunctions to charity, may not *now* be binding upon us; are we to conclude that they have *no sense* at all? Because we are not called upon to give *all* that we have to the poor; are we to suppose ourselves at liberty to give *nothing*, or so little in proportion to our means, that we should justly be ashamed of it? Can any man who has a spark of human feeling in his breast, even if he be destitute of religion, think this? Can any man who believes *only* in God and a future state, venture to act upon such an opinion? Can any one who *professes* only to be a Christian, dare to stake his salvation upon such an issue? Or can any one who is really a Christian, not be eager to give so just and so gratifying a proof of the sincerity of his faith, as that of relieving the sufferings of his fellow-creatures? I would fain hope that I am not addressing a single individual, capable of entertaining and acting upon sentiments so unworthy and so degrading as these.

Strong as the language of our Saviour constantly is upon the dangerous tendency of

riches, it is important to bear in mind, that it is not merely their *possession*, but their *abuse* against which his observations are pointed. Riches and poverty, and even the extremes of each, are conditions so evidently intended by the Almighty to exist amongst mankind, that it would be an argument against the truth of the Gospel itself, if it taught a different doctrine. But such is not the fact. On the contrary, it never speaks of the rich with censure, when their actions are not censurable ; and at least *implies* commendation when they deserve it. Thus Joseph of Arimathea is described, as *a rich man who was also Jesus' disciple*. And the manner in which he is mentioned, and the action recorded of him clearly shew, that no blame was imputed to him because he happened to be wealthy. So also, it is related by St. Mark, that *Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury : and many that were rich cast in much*. It is true that upon that occasion, the conduct of *the poor widow, in casting in all that she had*, is extolled above that of those, who gave of *their abundance* ; but it may fairly be inferred, that some degree of applause is in-

tended for them also. The Gospel also recognizes, and fully sanctions, all the various orders of men, of which society consists, from the highest to the lowest : that is, it recognizes the two extremes of poverty and riches, as conditions necessarily existing, and neither meritorious nor otherwise in themselves, but only as they are sustained by those who fill them. And it must be considered, as no slight proof, that the Apostles of our Lord, had imbibed the genuine spirit of his doctrines, that they exactly adhered to them in this respect. For looking upon them as merely ordinary and unassisted, and *poor* men, going about to inculcate a new religion, and *that* of the character of that of the Gospel ; the most natural error, into which they would unintentionally have fallen, would have been to declaim against the rich as such, and to represent their condition as one in itself odious both in the sight of God and man. But they have done no such thing. Like their Divine Master, they have fully admitted the necessity of subordination amongst mankind ; that is, of the various degrees of wealth and poverty. They have warned the rich of the serious obligations imposed upon them ; but they

have not so much as hinted, that opulence is in itself a crime. Indeed they could not have done so, without shutting their eyes to the moral constitution of man, and the physical properties of the globe. The extreme inequality in the mental powers of man, from the utmost capacity for those various scientific pursuits, by which individuals are so much benefited, and nations are so highly exalted ; to those humble qualifications, which are barely sufficient to enable them to perform the most ordinary services for the community ; is one unequivocal demonstration of the intention of the Almighty, respecting the different orders, of which societies have always been found to consist. Again, the remarkable distinction between the natural productions of the earth, and (we may add) the artificial inventions of human skill and ingenuity is another. The same God who has ordained the earth to bring forth the plainest food in abundance for the use of men, has also enabled it to produce with comparative scarcity, its more choice and excellent fruits. The same Almighty power which has created the ready means of clothing the naked in profusion, has also buried deeply in the earth the precious

metals, and the rarest and most beautiful gems—and these facts shew incontestibly, that he designed the wide distinctions of wealth and poverty, which have always prevailed amongst mankind. For as it is impossible to conceive, that he did not intend even *the rarest* and *most costly* fruits to be cultivated, or the most valuable minerals and jewels to be brought to light, for the service and the gratification of his creatures; we *must* conclude, that he also intended some of them to be extremely poor, and others extremely rich: for none but the *former* could be induced to labour for some of these objects; and none but the *latter* could be able to repay them, for such arduous and hazardous services.

But the more clearly we demonstrate the Providence of God to have permitted these distinctions of rich and poor, the more firmly do we establish the consequences deducible from it. For as God is essentially good and just, the purposes he had in view must be generally beneficial to his creatures. It is impossible to believe that he could have intended *one portion* (and that the *smallest*) of them, to be benefited at the expence of the rest. But his wisdom has devised a system, where-



ever man does not counteract it, whereby the greatest sum of happiness may be secured to all ; though in some instances it may be *really*, and in others *apparently* diffused with great inequality. He has marked out no less by his *works* than his *word*, that he has appointed *the rich* to guard against those evils, which may occasionally result from a state of things, so peculiarly advantageous to *them*, if they make a right use of it ; but infinitely more prejudicial to them if they do *not*. If they consider their riches as possessed by them for their *exclusive* gratification, they *trust* in them in the worst sense of the phrase ; and will infallibly, when it is too late, find that they have trusted in them to their eternal destruction. But if they consider themselves as stewards for the poor, and are determined to be found faithful in their stewardship, they may not only innocently enjoy all the rational advantages which their wealth can procure for them in *this* world ; but may also make it instrumental, to their eternal felicity in the *world to come*.

*As all things are possible to God*, we cannot doubt that he *could* have constituted this world, very differently from what he has done.

That he could have established a perfect equality amongst men, so that all should have had enough, and none any thing superfluous. And to meet such a state of things, he might no doubt have appointed uniformly prosperous and plentiful seasons, and have guarded against all those grievous vicissitudes in human affairs, which have hitherto been so lamentably frequent and disastrous. Whether this would have been preferable, to the actual course of his government, or at all consistent with his *great object*, which *must* be our *future eternal*, and not our *present brief* existence, is not the question. It is sufficient that he *might* have done *this*, but that he *has* done the very reverse. He has contrived a world, in which the utmost inequality amongst his creatures, is not the effect of accident, but of evident design. In which from unfavourable seasons, and a thousand other natural and political causes, multitudes *may be*, and *frequently are* involved in the deepest distress; but from which comparatively a few, are wholly exempt. Now, I would *seriously* ask all such persons, for what purpose they imagine themselves to have been so highly favoured above their fellow-creatures? Will they lay

claim to any superior *merit* of theirs, to account for this distinction? I hardly suppose they will *dream* of such a thing. Will they ascribe it to their pre-eminent abilities? Though in many instances *this* plea would be manifestly unsound, even when it were valid, the question would remain; to whom were they indebted, for those *very* abilities, but to *him*, who might in one moment have turned them into weakness and vanity? Will they confess then the *truth*, that God is the real author of all their prosperity; but maintain that he has bestowed it upon them freely, unconditionally, for their exclusive enjoyment, or for no other end that they can distinctly see and comprehend?

Again, I would call upon them with all seriousness, to reflect calmly upon this matter. Let them look around them and consider, whether there are not in the world unequivocal marks of the intentions of the Almighty, in permitting some to abound to excess, whilst others are utterly destitute? Whether the *word* of God as proclaimed in his Gospel, and his *works* as displayed in his creation, do not speak one and the same plain and intelligible language? We read in the simplicity of the

most ancient holy writ, that God had appointed seven years of great plenty in the land of Egypt, to be succeeded by seven years of grievous famine; and that his favoured servant Joseph, under the direction of his Spirit, counselled Pharaoh to take up the fifth part of the corn of the seven plenteous years, and to lay it up in store against the seven years of famine, *that the land perish not through the famine.* With the beneficial result of this, we are all well acquainted. Now what are the rich, if they allow themselves to be under the control of the Almighty, and responsible to him hereafter for their conduct, but *store-houses*, in which he lays up the superfluous accumulations of his bounty, to be distributed to the necessitous in times of pressure or scarcity? I do not mean to urge this argument too far. I do not contend for the literal sense of the Gospel upon this point. I make the fullest allowance, for whatever reasonable personal indulgence they may claim, as the fruit of their good fortune, or the reward of their abilities or their industry, for provisions for families, connections, and friends. I look to society as it is at this *moment*, and *in this country*; and not to what it *was* under our

Saviour's immediate ministry, or may become hereafter, when the full operation of the Gospel shall have entirely changed its aspect.— But keeping all these considerations in view, I still contend, that the sufferings of the labouring classes have not *yet* made that impression upon the hearts of their wealthy brethren, which even as *fellow-men*, and much more as *fellow-christians*, they *ought* to have done. Relief has indeed been poured forth, but in streams that bear no proportion to the mighty sources from whence it might have flowed. So at least, I firmly believe, upon such means of judging as I have in common with all who hear me. It is a fearful reflection for those whom it may concern, that the period of the greatest distress, which the poor of England probably ever knew, is also that, in which the opulent abound beyond all former example. How speedily would that distress disappear, could the rich be persuaded to imitate the conduct of those early Christians, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, who in a season of great dearth, *determined to send relief to their brethren, every man according to his ability.*

Powerfully as charity is required by our re-

ligion, it is of a sober and judicious kind, and holds out no encouragement to idleness, extravagance, or imposture. What was the language of St. Paul to the Thessalonians? *even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work neither should he eat.* Thus Christian charity is not at all at variance with sound policy. They concur in providing for those, and for *those only*, who from infancy, or age, or other infirmity, are unable to work; and for those who being both able and willing to be industrious, cannot from circumstances, over which they have no control, find any, or, at least, sufficient employment. These are the descriptions of persons, on whose behalf a call has gone forth from our gracious Sovereign, which I hope will be cheerfully and liberally answered, by the affluent classes of his subjects. The call is general, and the mode judicious. Because if it be adequately met by those, who are well able to meet it, its object will be fully accomplished; without pressing upon those, who with the best disposition to be charitable, have little means of gratifying it. They who have nothing to give to the poor, but their prayers or their mite, may still do them service, which

may avail them much ; and bring down the blessing of their Saviour upon their own heads. But they who have been favoured by Providence with abundance, have a correspondent duty to perform, of distributing abundantly to those who need it ; and they will be no less weak, than wicked, if they refuse to perform it. For if they trust in their riches to procure them happiness in this world, either by gratifying their pride, or indulging their appetites, or above all, by making senseless, and useless accumulations, they will in all probability be miserably disappointed. But if they venture to look beyond this world, and raise their hopes to the enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven, and still notwithstanding, pursue such courses, the text alone may assure them, upon what a wretched foundation their hopes are built. There is but *one* way, in which they *may* trust in their riches, with confidence for their present happiness, and through the merits of their Redeemer, for their future salvation. And that is, by making a wise, a generous, and a charitable use of them. An opportunity for that purpose, will probably before long be afforded you at your own houses, on the urgency of which, it is

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needless for me to insist. It is unhappily but too well known to all of us. That such an appeal may not be made in vain, either to your hearts or your understandings ; but that every man may be disposed to do his utmost, to remove the present distress, and to avert the fatal consequences which may ensue from it, may God of his infinite mercy grant,—to whom, with the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all praise, and glory, might, majesty and dominion, now, henceforth, and for ever.



## SERMON XI.

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1 CORINTHIANS XV. 22.

*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

THE doctrine of a future state of just retribution, is unquestionably the most important part of our religion. There are even many amongst its professors, who declare that “it appears to *them* to be *the one great* object of the Christian Revelation<sup>1</sup>.” With these our Church does not agree; holding that there are other, and equally essential doctrines, *as* clearly revealed in the Scriptures: but which are all inseparably connected with it, and without it, could avail us nothing. She yields therefore to none in maintaining, that the belief of a future life should be, and *will* be, if we really

<sup>1</sup> Belsham’s Calm Enquiry, p. 470.

possess it, the governing principle of our conduct. Not that without it, powerful motives are not wanting, to induce us to live virtuously—not that even *then* a wise and good man could fail to see, that his own truest interest would be best consulted, by promoting that of his fellow-creatures ; and by cultivating those kind and benevolent affections, which are comprehended under the duty of Christian charity : but that no other principle is capable of interposing a sufficient check upon the passions of bad men ; and that even good men would be liable at times to feel the want of its powerful support ; and be disposed to enquire to what end they were practising painful virtues, and imposing restraint upon strong and not unlawful inclinations : and to ask with St. Paul under similar impressions—*what advantageth it us, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.*

Deeply interesting as this subject is at all times, it has at this period of the year, a peculiar claim to our attention, when we are accustomed to commemorate the death and resurrection of our Saviour, which the same Apostle justly considers, as establishing the truth

of the doctrine, that *we also shall rise again*. For (he argues) *if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain.*

General as the belief of a future life has been in the world, it is certain that till the time of our Saviour, it rested no where upon solid ground, and that even *now* we have no other sufficient authority than *his*, to confide in it. It was *he alone* who *brought life and immortality to light*<sup>1</sup>. Amongst the ancient Grecian philosophers, there is said to have been but one who really believed it<sup>2</sup>. Yet his arguments, or rather those of his scholar, for the immortality of the soul, upon which it must be founded, are so inconclusive and unsatisfactory, that Cicero with all the additional light of three centuries to aid his enquiries, thus speaks of them. “Whilst I am reading, I am convinced; but when I close the book,

<sup>1</sup> See Whitby's Note on 2 Tim. i. 10.

<sup>2</sup> “Socrates was the only one of all the ancient Greek philosophers, who really believed the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments.”—Bishop Warburton's Divine Legation, vol. iii. p. 47.

and begin to reflect upon the matter, all my conviction vanishes<sup>1</sup>." It may be true, however, that the improvement which the human mind has since undergone, in moral and religious reasoning, has enabled it to take a clearer view of this great subject. But after all, we must come to the conclusion of one, who formerly occupied this pulpit, with distinguished ability—I mean Dr. Sherlock<sup>2</sup>, that "though there are a great many arguments for the immortality of the soul, and a future state, which we may think very good arguments, yet we must resolve our belief of another world wholly into Revelation."

But here arises an important question, which has formerly occasioned much controversy, not yet by any means at rest: and which must at times engage the thoughts of reflecting men. Our religion is built upon two Divine Revelations: that of Moses, and that of Christ: in the latter of which the doctrine of a future state is clear and positive: whilst in the former, it is wholly omitted: or at least, it is not taught expressly and unequivocally,

<sup>1</sup> Tusc. Disp. lib. i. c. 5.

<sup>2</sup> W. Sherlock on a Future State, p. 19.

and with that prominency, which its great importance seems absolutely to demand. My object in the present discourse, will not be to prove the truth of the doctrine, for that must be *here* perfectly unnecessary—but to account for the omission of it, in express terms, by Moses in the Pentateuch, and by the other writers of the Old Testament, upon Scriptural grounds: and from thence to shew the harmony and connection of the Mosaic, with the Christian dispensation.

But before I proceed to deduce this conclusion, from a consideration of the words of the text, it will be expedient to mention shortly the principal opinions which *have been* formerly, and still probably *are* maintained, upon this subject, by Christians and their adversaries. With the latter the omission of a future state by Moses, has been treated as a triumphant argument for their cause. A celebrated writer of this description of the last century, thus urges it in terms, which appear to startle even himself: and which I shall not quote in all their audacity. “This (he says) may be advanced with assurance: if Moses knew that crimes, and therefore idolatry, one of the greatest, were to be punished in another life;

he deceived the people in the covenant they made, by his intervention with God. If he did not know it, he was himself deceived. In either case, a covenant was made, wherein the conditions of obedience and disobedience, were not fully, nor by consequence, fairly stated.—The Israelites had better things to hope, and worse to fear than those which were expressed in it: and their whole history seems to shew, how much need they had of these additional motives to restrain them from Polytheism and Idolatry, and to answer the assumed purposes of Divine Providence<sup>1</sup>.” He contends further, that if Moses had known the doctrine in question, he must necessarily have taught it<sup>2</sup>: but it will appear in the course of this discussion, that whether he knew it or not, he was not authorized to teach it, which will fully account for his silence respecting it. “When I say (he observes) that Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments, my reason is this—that he *taught* neither, when he had to do with a

<sup>1</sup> Lord Bolingbroke, as quoted in the *Divine Legation*, vol. v. p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.

people, whom a theocracy could not restrain ; and on whom, therefore, terrors of punishment, future as well as present, eternal as well as temporary, could never be too much multiplied, or too strongly inculcated<sup>1</sup>.” I do not imagine that the argument on this side of the question, can be stated with more force and clearness, than is here exhibited. Divines in general, until Bishop Warburton wrote, have contended, on the other hand, and some<sup>2</sup> I know still contend, that the Jews had the doctrine, either by tradition, or by universal consent as a principle of natural religion<sup>3</sup>, or by inference from certain passages in the Pentateuch, as the covenant with Abraham and some others. Dr. Sherlock (for instance) writes thus. “ Now it is confessed by all, that the law of Moses contains no express promise of another life. But yet the whole Mosaical dispensation is one continued proof of it ; if we will allow that God had any wise designs

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. v. p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> See Lancaster's Harmony of the Law and the Gospel—passim.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Warburton thinks that natural religion teaches us to expect *ample* but *not eternal* rewards.—Vol. vi. p. 254.

in that dispensation, or the Jews any common sense to understand it<sup>1</sup>." He then produces many arguments to shew that the doctrine was implied in or to be inferred from various parts of the Mosaic law. But he fully admits, that it is not positively laid down, either by Moses, or by any other writer in the Old Testament. "And though (he says) I have shewn, there are very strong presumptions in the Jewish law of another and a better life after this, and such as gave good men a very firm belief of it, yet it is certain there are no express promises of life and immortality *in the Old Testament*; for they might easily be shewn, if there were any there<sup>2</sup>."

Such was the general state of the controversy, when the great Author of the Divine Legation of Moses engaged in it. Infidels contending from the absence of the doctrine of a future state, that the Old Testament (and by consequence the New, for the latter recognizes and is built upon the former) was not true. And their opponents insisting, that the doctrine was

<sup>1</sup> W. Sherlock's *Future State*, 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 331.



not as they supposed omitted, and that therefore, their conclusion was without foundation.

But Bishop Warburton took a quite different view of the matter. He agreed with neither of the parties. Relying upon the resources of a powerful intellect, which seemed to delight in surmounting difficulties; and aided by the most profound and various learning, he undertook to concede their premises to the Deists, but to disprove their conclusion: and to establish the conclusion of their adversaries, but upon different premises. In short, he engaged to prove the Divine authority of the Mosaic institutions, upon the very ground of their omission of a future state. And these were the main propositions upon which he relied for that purpose. That the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is necessary, and has always been so considered, to civil society. That it nevertheless made no part of the Mosaic law. That its absence can only be supplied by an extraordinary Providence, which should punish the wicked, and reward the good, in this life. That such a Providence was actually administered, under a Theocracy, to the Jews. That consequently

Moses, through whose medium it was administered, had a Divine commission<sup>1</sup>. Notwithstanding the great learning and ingenuity with which these propositions are supported throughout the work, and the great mass of valuable information, which it contains upon many collateral points, it may still be doubted whether the first position, that the doctrine of a future state *has always* been considered necessary to civil society, be sufficiently proved. And even (if it has) whether it is an answer to those who enquire, why, if the doctrine be true, it was excluded from the Mosaic code? This the learned author admits to be a weighty objection. He says—"though under an extraordinary Providence, there might be no occasion for the doctrine of a future state, in support of religion, or for the ends of government; yet as that doctrine is a truth, and consequently under every regimen of Providence useful, it seems hard to conceive, that the religious leader of the Jews, because as a lawgiver he could do without it, that therefore as a Divine he would omit it<sup>2</sup>." The

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. i. p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. vol. vi. p. 143.

only answer that can be given to this, I have already intimated, and it is the object of this discourse to develop it; that Moses was not authorized by the Almighty to promulgate it. The motive assigned for its general prevalence in the world, is inapplicable to the Deity.— For it seems to treat religion as a matter merely subservient to civil society; and to measure Divine power and wisdom by the standard of human policy. Nor do we know enough of the history of mankind to be able to say, that this particular doctrine has always been found necessary (except in the case of the Jews) for the purposes of civil government.

The assertions of the author upon this point are not a little astonishing. For he assures us, “that all mankind, especially the most wise and learned nations of antiquity, have concurred in believing and teaching, that the doctrine of a future state was necessary to the well-being of civil society<sup>1</sup>.” And yet, strange to say, he is equally positive in maintaining, that of all the ancient philosophers and law-givers who taught it, there was but one who

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. i. p. 297.

really believed it to be true<sup>1</sup>. That with the heathen world, it was only a matter of opinion or reasoning, either one way or the other, is certain. But to suppose that for so many ages men were governed by a principle, which they who taught it believed to be false, implies the existence of a degree of wickedness on the part of a few, and of weakness on the part of the many, which is, to say the least, extremely improbable. So far from its being indispensable for civil government, it may be questioned, whether even now with a large portion of mankind, by whom it is both known and believed to be true, the hope of present good and the dread of temporal evil, do not influence their conduct more, than the expectation of those consequences in a future state? And if so, important as the doctrine undoubtedly is as a revealed truth, to each individual as such, it does not appear to be absolutely essential to the maintenance of civil society. If its place could be supplied by an extraordinary Providence, under a Theocracy; possibly a judicious system of laws and a vigorous execution of them, might in a great degree supply it, under

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. iii. p. 47.

some of the common forms of human government.

But not to multiply objections, I will only mention one more, which appears to me to be insuperable. It is admitted that where the doctrine of a future state is wanting, it must be supplied by the administration of an extraordinary or particular Providence. Surely, therefore, this should have been very clearly proved to have existed in the case of the Jews. That is, that under the Mosaic economy, every Jew was actually rewarded or punished, according to his deserts in this life. But so far from it, it is not only granted, that numerous exceptions must have been found; which in such a case as this seems fatal to the rule itself; but the *fact* is not proved at all. It is only *inferred* from the omission of the doctrine of a future state. The argument is conducted in this circle. The omission could only be supplied by an extraordinary Providence, and the extraordinary Providence must be inferred from the omission. *This* is the author's own statement. "My argument does not require me to prove more, than that Holy Scripture represents an extraordinary Providence to have been administered. The proof of its

real administration, is established, by the medium of my thesis, the omission of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments<sup>1</sup>." The truth seems to be, that the government of the Jews at that time, was sufficiently under the immediate direction of the Deity, and distinguished enough from that of other nations, either before or since, to warrant us in calling it a Theocracy. But that nevertheless, the system of rewards and punishments administered to them, did not materially differ from that to which mankind in general have always been subjected. The virtues or the vices of individuals, were occasionally visited with temporal blessings or afflictions, as they *still* continue to be. And when great numbers for their offences incurred the dreadful judgments of the Almighty, as displayed in earthquakes, famine, and pestilence, the fate of the innocent must have been frequently involved in that of the guilty, which is almost inevitable according to the *present* constitution of things. And if so, the extraordinary Providence upon which the whole ar-

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 107—131.

gument is built, falls to the ground, and the superstructure with it.

It is much to be lamented that this admirable writer, instead of endeavouring to maintain this extremely difficult, if not, untenable hypothesis<sup>1</sup>, had contented himself with the humbler, but far more useful task, of shewing the real cause of the omission of the doctrine in question; and leaving the Divinity of the Mosaic institution to stand upon its own solid scriptural ground, had explained its connection and consistency with the Christian Revelation. The Divine Legation of Moses, stands in no need of such an argument for its support, nor could it be so supported if it did.— But the fact, that he did *not* positively and distinctly include a future state amongst the doctrines of that religion, which he taught the Israelites, by the express command of the Almighty, must be satisfactorily explained, before the truth of either the Jewish, or the Christian Revelations, can be firmly esta-

<sup>1</sup> Yet he was well aware of the danger to religion, from “adopting or espousing some favourite hypothesis, whereon to erect the Gospel system.”—Vol. vi. p. 231.

blished. That explanation I shall proceed therefore to give, from a consideration of the doctrine contained in the text. I have already more than once alluded to it, and it is contained in the great work to which I have so frequently referred. But it is there but briefly stated, and not unfolded with that care which its great importance demands. It is to be found in the latter part of the work<sup>1</sup>, written many years after the former parts of it, in the decline of the author's life, when his faculties were much impaired; and it is confessedly left very imperfect<sup>2</sup>. The consequence of which is, that this most material point, is not only not sufficiently cleared up, but it is also mixed with matter so visionary and fanciful, such as the state in which Adam lived before "his migration (as he terms it) into Paradise," and the law by which he was then governed, namely, "Natural Religion<sup>3</sup>:" that we can hardly

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Hurd's Life of the Author, vol. i. p. 86—89.

<sup>3</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. p. 246. Amongst "the follies of the wise" surely, this is entitled to a distinguished place. And hardly less so, is the assertion of the author's friend, Bishop Hurd—that "this ninth book is the noblest effort that has hitherto been made to give a *rationale* of Christianity."—Author's Life, vol. i. p. 89.



wonder at the judgment which was pronounced upon the whole work by a celebrated writer, within a few years after its publication. "The Divine Legation of Moses, he affirmed, to be a monument already crumbling in the dust, of the vigour and weakness of the human mind<sup>1</sup>."

But to proceed with the text. It appears to me to be clear, that the two parts of the sentence, *as in Adam all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive*, are co-extensive in their import: and are intended to be exactly opposed to, and contrasted with each other. That is to say, that the penalty, whatever it was, which was denounced against Adam and his posterity, was removed by the death of Christ, and not till then. The question therefore is, what was that penalty? To determine this point, we must have recourse to the second chapter of Genesis, for the terms in which his sentence is recorded. *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the*

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, vol. i. p. 139.

*day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.* Now it is certain that immediate death was not here intended, but a liability to it at some future period. But death has various senses in Scripture, and the question is what does it mean in this place? Paley observes that “in St. Paul’s Epistles, it hardly ever signifies natural death, to which all men of all kinds are equally subjected; but it means a spiritual death, or that perdition and destruction to which sin brings men in a future state<sup>1</sup>.” But this can *not* be its meaning in the book of Genesis; for if it is, the doctrine of a future state is at once revealed there, and it will be then quite impossible to account for the silence of Moses afterwards upon the subject.

It has been justly remarked, that “the threatening implied a promise, that if Adam did not eat of the fruit, he should not die, but live<sup>2</sup>.” But as his disobedience was to be equally hurtful to himself and his posterity, we must conclude that his obedience, would have been similarly beneficial in its conse-

<sup>1</sup> In his Sermon on Romans vii. 24. Part I.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Beveridge, as quoted in D’Oyly and Mant’s Bible.

quences, both to him and them. Immortality therefore to himself and his descendants, would have been the reward of his compliance with the command of his Maker. But how was this to have been accomplished? Could immortality upon earth have been intended? This appears to be quite inconceivable. That an infinite succession of immortal beings, should occupy a finite space, such as is the earth, or Paradise a portion of it, seems as plain an impossibility as can be stated. To say nothing of the incompatibility of human bodies, with eternal duration. Nor is this state of immortality upon earth, that which has been regained for us by the death of Christ. To meet this difficulty, some have supposed that men might have been translated to heaven, without passing through the grave, as Enoch and Elijah were. But though this cannot be said to have been impossible, the same answer recurs; this is not the condition, in which we have been placed by our Saviour. Upon this supposition, the two parts of the text are not so exactly opposed to each other as they seem evidently intended to be.

There remains therefore, but one method of interpretation, which appears to me to be

liable to no serious objection. Some commentators imagine that the death denounced against Adam had three senses : spiritual, temporal, and eternal. I consider the two last to be certain, and that the sentence *thou shalt surely die*, means thou shalt suffer total<sup>1</sup> and final extinction, without renovation : *for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*. If this be so, our redemption is exactly opposed to Adam's condemnation. We regain in Christ, precisely, what we lost in Adam, namely, a resurrection to another life. St. Paul in his Second Epistle to Timothy, declares that *Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel*. The death which he hath abolished, must be the same death to which Adam and his posterity were condemned, that is, not merely temporal but eternal death. If Adam's obedience would have rendered him not liable to temporal death, the obedience of Christ has not placed us in the same condition. Yet they are always represented in Scripture as equivalent.

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 259, 266, 326, 331, &c. vol. v. 440.

*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners: so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.* It seems impossible to doubt, that by the death of our Saviour, we are placed in precisely the same situation, in which we should have been, had Adam not offended. If then, it be admitted, that the punishment pronounced against him and his posterity, was death without resurrection, it follows, that Moses, if he were an inspired, or divinely commissioned legislator, or even a faithful historian of the fall by tradition, could not have made the doctrine of a future state, any part of his system. Though it might be obscurely included in the promise made to our first parents; though its probability might be inferred from the translation of Enoch; though it might be virtually contained in the covenant with Abraham; though natural reason might strongly suggest it, and though it might be darkly intimated in some of those prophecies, which were to be fulfilled by him, by whom it was to be brought to light—still, notwithstanding all this, Moses was entirely precluded from making it the sanction of his religion. If he *had* taught it, one part of the Pentateuch would have con-

tradicted the rest. As a doctrine of Revelation, it was not in existence, at the time when he lived, nor for many ages afterwards. It was in fact (if I may so express it) in abeyance from the fall of Adam, until the coming of Jesus Christ. And this is the reason, which Bishop Warburton assigns for its omission, and which appears to me to be perfectly clear and satisfactory. And I am not aware of any other explanation that either has or can be given of it. Those who are not satisfied with this account of it, contending up to the present moment, not indeed that it is to be found in the law of Moses, but that the Jews nevertheless had it in some other way. Were this opinion well founded, which I am persuaded it is not, it would only increase the difficulty of understanding, why Moses should not, over and over again, and in the most explicit terms, have pressed upon them, this, by far the most powerful motive, which he could urge, to induce their obedience, to the laws which he promulgated. His silence upon the subject, and still more than his silence, the temporal rewards and punishments, which he held out to them, which amount almost to a denial of it, is the point which requires explanation.—

That explanation I have endeavoured to give, in a way which is perfectly convincing to my own mind. But it will perhaps admit of confirmation, by examining some of the principal objections, that have been or may be made to it, which I propose to do upon a future opportunity.

In the mean time, let us reflect, that in proportion as our light is clear and steady, upon the great doctrine of a future state, so should its influence upon our lives be vivid and salutary. In particular upon this day, when we commemorate the great sacrifice, by means of which, we may become heirs of a glorious immortality ; let us resolve to be careful, lest by any misconduct on our parts, that sacrifice for us, shall have been made in vain. And whilst we offer up to our Redeemer our solemn thanks for the inestimable benefit which he has conferred upon us, let us implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, to guide us in our researches after Divine truth ; and to dispose our hearts to love and fear God, and to obey those commandments, the observance of which he has made the condition, through the merits of his Son, of our attainment of eternal life.

## SERMON XII.

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1 CORINTHIANS XV. 22.

*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

IN a former discourse from these words, I endeavoured to shew, that the reason why Moses *did* not and *could* not teach the doctrine of a future state of retribution to the Israelites was this, that he had no Divine authority for it, but, on the contrary, had to disclose a dispensation of the Almighty, which was in direct opposition to it, declaring that Adam and his posterity were under a sentence of death, or final separation of the soul from the body; combined, it is true, with some obscure intimation of a future undefined, but beneficial change in their condition. This interpretation of the sentence denounced against Adam, though not indeed *new*, is yet



sufficiently uncommon to make me feel some degree of diffidence in proposing it.—Nevertheless, after much reflection, I am satisfied that it *is* and *must* be true—and if so, that it furnishes, and can *alone* furnish, a complete answer to the difficulty, arising from the omission of a future state, in express terms, by Moses in the Pentateuch—whether this difficulty be urged in the manner of infidels, or silently felt in the embarrassment of believers. I have no hesitation in saying, that I have met with no other solution of it that is at all satisfactory to my *own* mind. I have adverted to the opinion of Dr. Sherlock, which seems to embrace all that has been said on that side of the question ; and I must beg leave to repeat it, that “ though there are very strong presumptions in the Jewish law, of another and a better life after this, and such as gave good men a very firm belief of it, yet it is certain there are no express promises of life and immortality, in the *Old Testament* : for they might easily be shewn if there were any there.”

Now if this were affirmed of almost any other doctrine of religion, it might perhaps be admitted to have some weight. But as ap-

plied to a *future state*, it compels us to pause before we can yield our assent to it. That a doctrine so fundamental as this is, upon which almost every thing that is sacred depends, without which, almost every other doctrine is comparatively unimportant; that this first principle of all religion and morality, should be left to be gathered from inferences and presumptions, amidst an express Revelation from heaven, extending even to points of very inferior moment, is what I find the greatest difficulty in conceiving. Undoubtedly we should have looked for something far different. We should have expected a future state, to have been the direct sanction of the Mosaic code, and to have found it in the very *front* of the Decalogue. Yet what is the fact? Compare the language of our Saviour upon this point, with that of the Jewish lawgiver. *If thou wilt enter into life* (says Jesus) *keep the commandments*: that is, the very commandments in question. Yet if we turn to them, as originally delivered by Moses, we find not the smallest allusion to a future life. St. Paul describes the fifth commandment thus—*Honour thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise*;

*that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.* This must be understood to mean with a *special* promise : for the second commandment contains a *general* promise, of punishment or mercy reciprocally, even to the remote descendants of those who are obedient or disobedient : but this, like the other, is altogether of a temporal nature, and respects this life only.

Such is the nature of the difficulty, arising from the omission in positive terms of a future state by Moses. And it does *not* appear to me to be removed, by saying, that the Jews had the doctrine in some other way : even if there were any good grounds for that opinion, which I think there are not ; at least until long after the period when Moses wrote.— How then do I propose to meet this difficulty ? I have already stated and adopted Bishop Warburton's solution of it, which is simply this : that Moses was not commissioned to teach it, because it was reserved for another dispensation, at the head of which was our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. But the question remains, why was he not commis-

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 144.

sioned to teach it, if it were true : which the argument of Dr. Sherlock, to which I have adverted, (and with which those who have written upon this subject, in general seem to agree) assumes to be the fact : why was he permitted in *any degree* to conceal the *most material doctrine* which he could have communicated ? My answer to this question has also been explicitly given. *It was not at that time true.* The descendants of Adam were then under a sentence of death, without any assurance from heaven of another life. But as this opinion is, so far as I know, the reverse of that usually entertained, I will endeavour to give it some additional support.

Mankind having now been accustomed for so many ages, to regard death as merely a temporary separation of the soul from the body : and Christians having been taught to believe, that all who have ever lived, shall rise again to be rewarded or punished, according to their deserts : seem to consider the penalty of death, which Adam incurred, and entailed upon them, to have borne originally the *same* sense which it does *now*. But could *Adam* have so understood it ? What was there in the terms, *thou shalt surely die* : or in

these—*for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*: which could have suggested to his mind the idea, that he was to exist *again*, and *that* eternally in a state of bliss or misery? The very reverse of this seems to be declared in the same chapter. *And now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever*. Whatever may be the meaning of these words, at least, they give no countenance to the opinion, that Adam had any intimation of a future state of existence. It may be said, that the record of this period is so brief, that the Almighty may have instructed our first parent in *many things* which have not been expressly transmitted to us. This is true. But is it likely, that *this* most important of *all things*, both to him and his posterity to know, should have been of the number? And supposing it were, should we not expect to meet with some clear traces of it, in the history of the first ages both before and after the flood? But are there any such, in the book of Genesis, or in any part of the Pentateuch? I am not aware of any. In the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis, we have a very particular account of the instructions of Jacob to his children, upon his death-bed, in which

even a prediction of the future coming of the Messiah is included. But even *here*, there does not appear the slightest expectation, that they should meet again in another life. The conclusion is, merely, that *he yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*

But if, from examining the history of the Fall, and of the Patriarchal ages, we are satisfied that no promise of a future life was then made to mankind; how much more must we be convinced of it, when we turn to the language of our Saviour, upon the same point! If the original sentence of death *included* a promise of a resurrection; in what sense could he declare, that *he was the resurrection and the life*: or the Apostle affirm, that he had *abolished death*? If it did not *exclude* it, how are we to understand the declaration of St. Paul, that *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord!* in which, as in the text, the two things seem to be directly contrasted with each other.

My object being merely to account for the silence of Moses respecting a future state: if I have succeeded in that respect, I have answered the two infidel arguments, which I

noticed in my former discourse: the one of which, assuming the doctrine to be true, charges him with ignorance of it; and the other, supposing him to have known it, imputes deceit to him in suppressing it. To neither of which accusations is he (according to my view of the subject) liable. But there *have been, and still are*, many persons who think, that although it is not expressly mentioned in the Pentateuch, its author and his countrymen must have been acquainted with it. I have already argued, that if he knew it *upon Divine authority*, he *must* have taught it openly and prominently; and made it, as our Saviour did, the very foundation of his system'. His knowledge of it from any other source, could not, to him, have been authentic: and his teaching it upon such grounds would have been at variance with his character of an inspired writer; who was bound to declare nothing, but what was expressly revealed to him. Thus, it has been said, he might have learned the doctrine from the Egyptians. And indeed, we are told in the Acts of the Apostles, that he was *learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*. It is true, that the Pagan notions of a future state

are to be traced in Egypt up to a very high antiquity. But that they existed there in the time of Moses can certainly not be proved. But supposing they did, it would only serve to confirm my argument<sup>1</sup>. If Moses could have permitted himself to borrow *any* religious doctrine from the Egyptians, surely that of a future state, which is so reasonable in itself, so worthy of the Deity, and seemingly so necessary, for the purpose of controlling the people, whom he was divinely appointed to instruct and govern, would have been *that* which he would doubtless have selected.— Yet he has not done so. And it would be difficult to discover any other sufficient reason for his conduct in this respect, than that which I have suggested.

And this will serve also to throw some light upon a matter of which infidels, we have seen, have not neglected to avail themselves, and which even believers may be apt sometimes to regard with astonishment. I allude to the obstinacy and wickedness, which the Hebrews so frequently exhibited, even under the administration of a Theocracy. Although (as I

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 108, 123, 133.



have before contended) the doctrine of a future state be not *absolutely essential* to civil society, yet there can be no doubt, that it is a most *powerful auxiliary* to it : and that in proportion as it is firmly impressed upon the minds of a people, their conduct will be virtuous, and their government easy. If then it be abstracted *entirely* (as in the case before us), and *temporal* rewards and punishments be alone inculcated, we can hardly wonder at any degree of depravity at which a people, under such circumstances, may arrive. And such, in fact, appears to have been the case with the Israelites. If this were represented to us as the whole of God's dealings with them, I admit that it would be extremely difficult to comprehend it. But viewed, as the Scriptures describe it, as a partial and temporary dispensation, introductory to another, which was to be universal and final, much, if not all of its difficulty vanishes. It is at least, perfectly consistent with the account which he, who best understood both the Jewish and the Christian Revelations, (I mean the great Apostle to the Gentiles) has transmitted to us. *The law* (says he) *made nothing perfect : but the bringing in of a*

*better hope did.* At another time, he describes it, as *a shadow of good things to come—and as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.* Considered in this point of view, as a part of an immense scheme of Divine wisdom, which is, *even as yet,* but very limited in operation ; we have surely no reason to doubt, that the benefit to be derived to the world in general, from the withholding the knowledge of a future state from the early Jews, may far exceed the detriment, sustained by them in particular, from that cause. If it contribute to strengthen the evidence, and ultimately therefore to the universal establishment of Christianity, its reasonableness and utility cannot justly be questioned. The materials, which constitute the foundation of a building, may be, and commonly are, very different from, and very inferior in value to those, which compose the superstructure ; but they are not the less necessary on that account, nor can they be displaced, without endangering the edifice.

But there are those, who would object to my argument, certain texts both of the Old and New Testament, which appear to them to prove, that a future state was always the doc-

trine of the Jews. I shall have time to notice only one or two of the strongest of these. But I must observe once more, that I am only contending that Moses did not expressly teach it; and explaining why he did not; a point, in my opinion, of the utmost importance. With what was disclosed upon it by subsequent prophets, I am not immediately concerned. The doctrine *does* appear in fact, to have spread amongst them (probably from various sources) by degrees; between the time of Moses<sup>1</sup>, and that of our Saviour: when we find the two great sects, of the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, divided upon it: the former receiving it, and the latter rejecting it: which seems clearly to shew, that up to that period it had *not* been expressly revealed to them; but that it was reserved for the Gospel *alone*, to *bring life and immortality to light*.

The strongest text in the Old Testament, upon this point, is unquestionably that of Job: *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see*

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 142.

*God.* There is the greatest difficulty in determining precisely the sense of these words, from the impossibility of ascertaining the age, the author, or the nature and object of the book : upon all which points the opinions of learned men are extremely at variance <sup>1</sup>. If we were to adopt the sentiment of some, who think that Moses himself, or some one contemporary with him, was the author, it would be impossible to reconcile the explicit mention of it in this passage, with total silence upon it at all other times : particularly, when we observe, that in the Jewish law, matters of far inferior moment are urged, over and over again, upon the attention of the Israelites. It is also remarkable, that there is not another passage in the book of Job, in which this doctrine is insisted upon, at least with equal clearness, though the argument would seem very frequently to require it : and there are even some, in which it appears to be doubted or denied <sup>2</sup>. All that we can conclude with certainty upon it, is, that it is a prophetic intimation of a future state, delivered probably, long after the

<sup>1</sup> Divine Legation, vol. v. 299, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. vol. v. 373, &c.

time of Moses : connected with a prediction of the Messiah, and referring to him for its completion : similar in all respects, to another equally strong declaration of David in the sixteenth Psalm : which we are assured in the Acts of the Apostles, was spoken not of his own resurrection but prophetically of that of Christ. I am not aware of any thing else in the Old Testament, which can be urged against my argument, so plausibly as this ; yet it will be seen, that it has but a very slight bearing upon it.

But there remain to be considered some texts of the New Testament, which (as Bishop Warburton forcibly observes) *are brought to prove against itself, that life and immortality were brought to light by the Old.* The most material of these, are these words of our Saviour, reported by St. John. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.* That some of the Jews had at this time conceived notions of a future state from some parts of their Scriptures, is extremely evident : but that our Saviour did not confirm those notions (except with reference to himself) is equally so. For he adds immediately,

*and ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* The most natural meaning of his words upon this occasion is this—Search the Scriptures for a testimony of me, through faith in whom, ye may inherit eternal life.—Indeed upon the supposition, that the Jews had previously a Revelation, by which they could in *any manner* attain it, the mission of Christ becomes perfectly unintelligible. For if so, they were already in possession of *that*, which the whole Christian scheme teaches us to be unattainable, but by the atonement of Jesus, and obedience to his commandments. After this, it is hardly necessary to say, that the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which has been sometimes relied upon, as a decisive proof, that a future state was taught under the law, cannot receive that interpretation, without contradicting the rest of that Epistle; and the express declarations of its author, upon this point, in several others. In addition to those, to which I have already referred, I will mention but one more from the Epistle to the Galatians, which seems to place the doctrine of the great Apostle upon this head, beyond dispute. *For if, (says he) there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily*

*righteousness should have been by the law.* So far from the *end*, which is *eternal life*, being promised by the Mosaic dispensation ; the *means* are not so much as indicated by it, by which it can be obtained.

And this leads me to notice the last objection, which may be urged, against the view which I have been taking of this subject.—Some persons may think, that it is at variance with the former part of the seventh article of our Church : which affirms that *the Old Testament is not contrary to the New : for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ.* If I rightly understand this proposition, it is the very same for which I contend. Wherever the Old Testament promises the Messiah, it promises everlasting life. But only *through our Saviour*, until whose coming, or rather until whose death and resurrection, the promise was not in operation. Though when it commenced, it had a retrospective influence upon the salvation of all men, whose faith and virtue had been commensurate with the light which they had received, or the opportunities which they had enjoyed. The article affirms also that “ the old Fathers (or in the Latin

version simply *veteres*) did not look only for transitory promises." Who are intended here does not appear. Probably those who are enumerated in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, who are said to have *died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off*. That it was given to them individually, to have a prophetic view of a *heavenly country*, must be admitted. Yet (as Bishop Burnet observes) "it cannot be denied, but that it was *as a light that shined in a dark place, till the day-star did arise* <sup>1</sup>." And what was so imperfectly visible to them, we may readily believe was not seen by the people at all. That is, that the doctrine of a future state had not been taught to them, as an express Revelation from heaven: the only ground upon which even *at this day*, it can be relied upon with absolute confidence.

In my former discourse, I intimated an opinion, that the reward of obedience to Adam and his posterity, had he entitled himself to it, could *not* have been immortality upon earth—and I have found no reason to change

<sup>1</sup> On the Seventh Article.



it. But the determination of this point, is not material for my purpose. The case supposed never existed. The Bible is wholly silent upon it. The Almighty foresaw and provided for another contingency—namely, the disobedience of Adam, and denounced against it the penalty of death: which, as I contend, of itself excludes the idea of a resurrection: or the declaration of the Apostle, that Jesus Christ hath *abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*; becomes quite unintelligible.— Under this unrepealed, and unmodified sentence, mankind lay, when Moses made public, by the command of God, the Jewish law: and nothing short of this will, in my judgment, satisfactorily account for his omitting to make a future state the sanction of that code. Nor does it appear, that until it was proclaimed by our Saviour, the doctrine could ever be said to rest upon Divine authority.

Enough I trust has been said to establish the consistency of the Old and the New Testaments, upon this very important question— an object, surely, of the deepest interest, to all who hold religion in due estimation. To

prove the consistency of writings in general, is not, I know, to prove their truth : for works of fiction may be, and commonly are, consistent with themselves. But this must be understood of single and independent compositions. If this were the character of the sacred volume, its mere consistency would be hardly any argument at all of its truth. But when we consider of what it consists, namely, of writings by various authors, and of very different kinds, commencing with the remotest antiquity, and extending over a period of more than four thousand years—having for their principal object, to record two distinct but connected, yet in some respects, opposite Revelations of the Almighty to man ; conveyed through the medium of types, prophecies, and miracles—if under such circumstances, the consistency of the whole should be clearly established, it would not fall far short of a proof of their veracity. And if even in a single point, of great moment, it has been shewn, that apparent discrepancy is free from real contradiction, something I hope has been done for the confirmation of our faith. For although consistency cannot strictly be alleged, as a proof of the Scriptures ; inconsistency (if fairly

proved) must be fatal to them : so far at least, as our imperfect reason can be permitted to judge at all, of Divine things.

The conclusion, which I would press upon your minds, my brethren, from the whole is this. The ignorance of the Jews, under which may be included their doubts, and conflicting opinions, respecting a future state, is sometimes made by our Saviour and his Apostles, an apology for their inveterate obstinacy and deplorable wickedness. But nothing of this kind can be offered for us, if we are wavering in our faith, or vicious in our conduct. In particular, upon the great doctrine in question, the Gospel which has cleared up every difficulty, has left us absolutely without excuse, if we do not regulate our lives upon the firm belief of that awful dispensation. If upon any one point more exactly than another, reason and Revelation coincide, surely, it is upon *this*, at once consoling, yet alarming expectation. Consoling, if we so discipline our minds, and order our actions, that *our hearts condemn us not, but allow us to have confidence towards God*. Alarming, if through unbelief, we reject the means of salvation, and yield ourselves to the influence of

any of those evil passions, whose results even *here*, are but too often indicative of what they may deserve hereafter. That such may not be our fate, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, &c.

## SERMON XIII.

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ACTS II. 4.

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

THE miracle described in these words, which upon this day we annually commemorate, may be regarded as the key-stone of the arch upon which our religion is built. We can conclude no less from the language employed by our Saviour himself with reference to it. He describes it as the last great effort, which would be made by the Almighty, to establish the true faith in the hearts of men. For such is the most probable meaning of that singular declaration, that *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost should not be forgiven unto men, neither in this world nor in that to come.*—All other sins he represented as comparatively venial, even that of speaking against himself

in his human capacity, as *the Son of Man*.— But to attribute the miracles which he wrought by the Holy Ghost, to the power of Satan ; and still more to vilify or to disregard the visible and manifest agency of that Divine Spirit, whose mission seems to have depended upon our Lord's previous departure from the world, and to have been intended to crown and consolidate all the labours of his ministry, was declared to be an unpardonable offence. All other sins admitted of forgiveness upon repentance and amendment. That was the leading principle of his doctrine. A doctrine not more worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God, than adapted to the infirmity and the wickedness of man. But here was a sin which absolutely precluded repentance. For it was nothing less than obstinately to refuse to be convinced by the power of God himself directly exerted for that purpose, to *quench and to grieve his Holy Spirit*, when actively employed for the redemption and the salvation of the world.

If we who are living under different circumstances, and receiving our religion in a different manner, are (as we may be permitted to hope) incapable of committing a sin of this enormity :

still it becomes us well to consider, what approach we can make to it ; whether the evidence we have of our faith *is* inferior to that of the first Christians, and consequently whether we are more excusable in our incredulity than they were or could be ? And I am much mistaken, if we shall not find that our situation in this respect is more perilous, than many persons perhaps imagine it to be ; that we have in fact stronger evidence of the truth of our religion than is commonly supposed, and therefore stronger grounds for believing it, and more powerful motives for practising it. I cannot suppose that I am addressing any persons who do not profess to believe it : but can it be true, that there may be those whose profession, however constant, is not sincere and well-founded ? This is a most important question, which it well becomes every man to examine in his own case, with the most rigorous impartiality. *The heart*, has been truly said by one of the sacred writers, to be *deceitful above all things* : and I fear, that in the matter of religious belief, there will be found no exception to this humiliating position.— That in *that* as in every thing else, we are liable to practise, and do in fact frequently

practise, the grossest deception upon ourselves. *If any man* (says St. James) *seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* Here we have an exemplification of this doctrine, in a very extensive class of offences, which a man may commit, whilst he seems to be religious ; and is therefore deceiving both himself and others in that respect. The offences of which the tongue may be guilty by falsehood, in swearing, in provoking to anger, and in all the endless modifications of those vices, with their dismal consequences, would present indeed a long and frightful catalogue. But they would still exhibit but a small part of those sins, which are but too frequently committed, by men who do not scruple to call themselves Christians, and who probably consider themselves to be justly entitled to that appellation.

But I by no means intend to insinuate or to assert, that it is every breach of Christian rules or morals, that will amount to a proof, that a man is insincere in his profession of that faith. Were this so, Christianity itself could be hardly said to have any existence. For



the same Apostle, whose doctrine I am stating, has also assured us, that *in many things we offend all*. It is not therefore the *occasional*, but the *habitual and uniform* violation of his precepts, that will exclude us from the benefits of our Saviour's sacrifice, and demonstrate that we are not worthy to be called his disciples. It is to be feared, that there are but few persons who have not to reproach themselves for the frequent neglect, or the inadequate performance, of some of the duties enjoined by our religion. So long as they do *thus* reproach themselves, there is room to hope that they may at length attain unto an effectual repentance, and an entire amendment, and become reconciled to their own consciences and to God. But should they go on from day to day (as too many do) in the total and deliberate omission of any *one* branch of Christian morals, without any "compunctious visitings" of remorse, or any serious intentions of a change of conduct; however regular may be their observance of the external forms of Christianity, and constant their declarations of adherence to its faith, it is but too certain that they are delud-

ing themselves, with a vain expectation of partaking of the benefits of *that* covenant, the conditions of which they have failed to observe.

But faith not only cannot consist with *bad conduct*—it may be endangered also by *erroneous judgment*. There have not been wanting those, who after wavering between errors of an opposite kind in this matter, have settled at last in Scepticism or Infidelity. It is of the utmost importance therefore, that we should bring to its consideration minds free from prejudice, and anxious only for the discovery of truth. “*What is truth?*” was a perplexing question to the Roman governor. And it will be equally so to us with regard to religion, if we do not seek it in the Scriptures *alone*, and reason upon *them* with clearness and simplicity. The diversity of doctrines that have been, and are deduced from them by equally able and good men, should teach us to exercise the utmost caution in forming *our own* opinions of them, and to treat with great forbearance those, which we deem erroneous *in others*. Faith itself we know, is very differently understood by different denominations of Christians, and even by individuals of

the same denomination. That we may fix our's upon a sound yet a rational foundation, it is necessary to form a correct notion of its nature. To understand both what it is, and what it is not. It is different from knowledge, though it may perhaps possess equal certainty. For "that which is credible may be the object of faith in one person, of evident knowledge in another<sup>1</sup>." They who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, knew it to be true: we who did not witness it, believe it upon their testimony. Now the credibility of testimony, depends entirely upon the ability and integrity of the witness. If we have no reason to doubt that he who testifies, knows the truth of what he affirms, and has no disposition to swerve from it, we naturally and almost inevitably believe him. The whole business of this world could be carried on upon no other principle. But still this is but *human faith*; "And as the knowledge of all men is but imperfect, and their hearts deceitful, and consequently their integrity may be suspected, there can be no infallible ground of *human faith*."<sup>2</sup> But in "Divine faith,"

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Pearson on the Creed—Article 1st.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

that is, in revealed religion, the case is different. There the witness is "infallible," for he can neither deceive nor be deceived, being no other than God himself. No matter what may be the nature of his communication; if we are satisfied that he has made it, we are bound to believe it, and indeed *can* do no otherwise, though it may be partially, or even entirely, beyond the bounds of our comprehension. When he assures us, for instance, that he *is a spirit*, and that he has existed from eternity, we cannot hesitate to admit those propositions to be indisputably true; though we can form no ideas whatever, of the nature of a purely spiritual being, nor of that of eternal existence. The only question here is, has the Revelation been made? And what were the proofs, by which it was supported?

Now the only conceivable proofs in such a case are miracles. They have been called, and truly called, the "proper credential of a messenger from heaven<sup>1</sup>." And accordingly they were granted in great abundance, both

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Warburton's Sermon on 1 Cor. i. 30.—  
Works, vol. ix. 83.

in the Jewish and the Christian Revelations. They both stand upon them to this day.— And it is extremely difficult to conceive, how they could ever have been established without them. Mahomet laid no claim to miracles, at least he performed none publicly and credibly attested. And consequently what is called his religion, however numerous its followers and believers may be, has no pretence to the name and character of a Divine Revelation. But Moses and Christ appeal to miracles continually; and had they not performed them, it seems impossible to understand how they could have obtained belief from any reasonable beings even for a moment: and much less how they could have established systems of religion, which subsist in all their original integrity to this very day.

But still it may be said, although their contemporaries who witnessed their miracles, had unerring grounds for *their* belief, which were transmitted with a force but little diminished, to their immediate successors: yet the case with respect to us is very different, who live at this great distance from those transactions, and have nothing to rely upon in support of

their performance, but the written testimony of those who profess to have witnessed them ; which is still but *human testimony*, and therefore (as we have seen) not infallibly true.— Now bearing always in mind, that the miracles were solid grounds for *their* belief, and therefore if their testimony has come correctly down to us, which has never yet been successfully impeached, are equally entitled to our credence ; I think we may advance the matter still farther, and find ourselves placed in circumstances more nearly resembling those of the original witnesses of our faith, than is commonly supposed ; and consequently enabled to have a firmer assurance of it, than can be derived solely from their authority. The Jews have been said, and properly said, to be a standing miracle. That is, their present existence, with their ancient rites, ceremonies, and institutions, preserved unchanged since their first establishment ; notwithstanding their calamities and various dispersions, and even their dissolution as a nation : are strong evidence of the fidelity of the Scriptural account of the Mosaic dispensation ; a dispensation claiming to rest upon Divine authority, evinced by the performance of numerous and public

miracles. Again, the actual condition of this singular people, seems to be a very striking completion of many prophecies (which are but another species of miracles) respecting them. Surely in the absence of any other account than that which the Bible affords us of these matters, these corroborating circumstances *do* add considerably to the credibility of the testimony upon which we receive them, and believe them to be true.

And I think an argument of a similar kind may be deduced in support of the miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, from the *existence* at this day of the Christian religion. That it *does* exist, and that its origin can be traced up with certainty to the Apostolic times, will not admit of dispute. That there never has been any other or different account of its origin, than that contained in the New Testament, is also beyond controversy. That the Apostles were the teachers of the religion cannot be denied. That they were all illiterate men, "Galilæans," seems from the nature of the case, independent of the Scriptural history of the transaction, to be highly probable. That they did nevertheless rapidly communicate the Gospel to distant

and foreign countries, for which a knowledge of other languages than their own was indispensable, is unquestionable. That *that* knowledge was miraculously imparted to them, is the positive assertion of Scripture. That being such men as they were, they had other and natural means of acquiring it, has not, that I am aware of, ever been attempted to be shewn. The existence of the religion therefore at this hour, in unbroken succession from the time of the Apostles, is a fact which can hardly be explained but upon the admission of the miracle recorded in the text, and *we ourselves* may be said to be almost its witnesses, and to have the highest assurance possible, that our faith is indeed of Divine original.

Although the mere establishment of a religion cannot be urged as a conclusive argument of its truth, since *false religions* have undoubtedly existed, and do still exist: yet is there great weight in the observation of Gamaliel, that if Christianity *were of men, it would come to nought: but if it were of God, it could not be overthrown.* Is history at all at variance with this declaration? I think not. What religion is there at present of human



invention, that has a better prospect of permanent duration, than had the Grecian and Roman superstitions, in the days of the Apostles? Yet *they* have totally disappeared from the face of the earth. And their destruction of itself bears no slight testimony to the supernatural power with which the Apostles were armed, which can alone account for their victory, in so apparently unequal a contest. Again to what hazards have the Jewish and Christian dispensations, been continually exposed! The *former* from the perverse character of the Jews, who could hardly be restrained from falling into idolatry, even when living under the immediate government of the Almighty; from their chance of being incorporated into the religious societies of the various nations, amongst whom they have dwelt: and from the many severe persecutions which they have suffered, to compel them to abandon their faith! The *latter* from the ceaseless efforts of Sceptical and Infidel writers, to undermine the authority of the Gospel, from the corruptions with which wicked men have loaded it, and from the absurdities by which weak men have exposed it to ridicule: from the little influence which it has produced upon

the lives of most of its professors, and the inadequate effect which it has had upon almost all of them ! Add to which, the lamentable differences in doctrine and discipline, by which Christians have constantly been divided amongst themselves. Differences which one would think must speedily be terminated, could they but once bring to their discussion, that Divine principle of *charity which is the very bond of peace and of all virtues* ; could they be persuaded to reason with simplicity, upon what is clear in the Scriptures, and mutually to forbear to dogmatize upon points upon which the human mind even in its highest state of vigour and cultivation, is totally unable to pronounce with certainty. Yet notwithstanding all these sources of danger, and many more which might be enumerated, the Jewish and Christian Religions still subsist, because they were the *work of God*, and we doubt not will continue to subsist, until the period shall arrive when his providence has ordained, that the former shall merge in the latter, that *there shall be one fold and one shepherd* ; and that *every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father*.

It appears therefore that we have something *more* than human testimony, in support of that great miracle, which we this day celebrate. That our very meeting here is to a great extent a confirmation of it. That we are in fact assembled, under and by virtue of the influence of that mighty Spirit, which, as at this time, so many ages ago, visibly descended upon the heads of the Apostles, and thereby completed the foundation of the enduring structure of the Christian Church. It appears also that the building which he then raised by his power, he has since sustained by his wisdom, and that we are permitted by his unspeakable goodness, to reckon ourselves amongst its most favoured inhabitants: enjoying many privileges, not as yet imparted to all who live under his benignant sway. If so, I ask, what manner of men we ought to be, who are thus highly distinguished? What is our duty more especially, to that *Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of Redemption?*

Now this seems naturally to admit of a threefold division, as it respects ourselves, our neighbours, and our God. First then, it becomes us to implore *the Spirit of truth to*

*guide us into all truth*, and to enlighten our minds with Divine knowledge. By so doing, we shall at least preserve them in that state of docility and humility, which our Saviour so constantly and so earnestly inculcated, as the very basis of the Christian character: and we shall check the growth of those vices to which it has always been peculiarly exposed, of spiritual pride, and presumptuous intolerance. And secondly, we should invoke his aid, as our promised *Comforter*, to support us under the various trials of this transitory life.— There are many of these, for which all other aid is absolutely unavailing, but none for which a firm reliance upon him, who *helpeth our infirmities*, and *maketh intercession for us*, will not afford some mitigation.

But whilst we acknowledge, and even solicit, the influence of this Holy Spirit, we must be careful not to fall into the common error of fanaticism, of imagining that it can be perceptible by us, in any other manner than by its effects. Of *these* we may form a tolerable judgment, but of the mode of its operation, we must be totally ignorant. *The wind* (said our Saviour to Nicodemus) *bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,*

*but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

And this will lead us to the consideration of the next branch of this duty, as it regards our neighbour, which will consist chiefly, if not entirely, in the cultivation of those *fruits of the Spirit*, which have relation to our intercourse with each other. These are principally—*love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness*. These are the virtues which should distinguish and adorn the members of Christian societies. Happy would it be for them if their *past history* reflected greater credit upon them in this respect than it does, and if their *present condition* were more satisfactory, or their *future prospects* more consolatory than they are. It is a melancholy consideration, that the principles of Christianity cannot sometimes be vindicated but at the expence of Christians. For whilst its spirit breathes nothing but *peace and good will on earth amongst men*, the practice of its followers has seldom been free from strife and discord.—That this state of things should be perpetual, we cannot possibly believe, for it would strike at the very root and foundation of the religion

itself. Its very *truth* cannot be maintained upon such an hypothesis. Is it not then our clear duty, to endeavour to hasten the period of universal concord? And how can this be accomplished but by mutual concession? Do not the principles of Protestantism call upon *us* to take the lead in this pious and charitable work? If we have in former times had great reason to complain of our Catholic brethren, are we not expressly commanded to *forgive our brother, not seven times but seventy times seven?* that is, to extend to him unlimited forgiveness. Is it for us to adopt some of the worst principles, for which we separated, and justly separated, ourselves from the Romish Communion? Religious bigotry, persecution, intolerance, and assumption of infallibility, are equally odious, whether they proceed from a Catholic or a Protestant.—Nay, they are much *worse* in the latter case, because they are inconsistent with the principles which he professes, which cannot perhaps be said of the former instance. I do therefore think that *as Protestants*, we are especially bound to make the most earnest *efforts* at least, to *live in unity and godly love*, with all our Christian brethren of every persuasion.

For till Christians are united amongst themselves, it will be in vain for them to expect, to make much progress in bringing infidels and heathens to the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel. Be it that measures of conciliation may not be unattended with some inconvenience, or even *danger*—(an apprehension however, which I believe to be perfectly groundless,) still as the danger (if any) is of a *civil* and *secular* nature, and cannot be extended to our religious interests, it ought not to be brought into competition, with the paramount object, of establishing Christian amity and peace. The security for our faith, is in ourselves and in our God, and requires no other protection or support. If we are true to him, and honour him not with our lips only, but in our lives and conversations, he will not desert us, nor suffer our Christian liberty to be withdrawn from us, either by force or fraud. When we were few in number, and destitute of worldly strength, by the force of truth and reason alone, we triumphed over superstition and error, in all the plenitude of their power and dominion. And is it to be imagined, that *now* when we are *relatively* as strong, as we were formerly weak, we can be

again brought under the *yoke of bondage*, by those who are comparatively sunk into impotence and decrepitude? I make no apology for throwing out (not unseasonably I trust) these few observations, because I think the time *is come*, when it is the bounden *duty* of every clergyman, to deliver from the pulpit his conscientious opinion upon a matter which lies within their peculiar province: and which has so long agitated and divided this land.

It remains only to add a few words, upon the third and last point to be considered, which respects our duty to the Holy Spirit, as he is *our God*. And this will consist in praying to him for that influence which he can *shed abroad in our hearts*, for the confirmation of our faith, the increase of our hope, and the extension of our charity: and in offering to him that worship to which we believe him to be entitled, as the third person of the blessed Trinity. But as the former part of this subject has been already very much anticipated in this discourse, and the latter part, we shall immediately be engaged in performing, in the most solemn and appro-



priate manner, at *the table of our Lord*, I shall now conclude, with ascribing to him, conjointly with the Father and the Son, *all power and glory, might, majesty and dominion, henceforth and for ever.*

## SERMON XIV.

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1 THESSALONIANS v. 21.

*Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.*

THE best things are liable to abuse ; and when abused become prejudicial in proportion to their value when properly employed.— Life, health, and wholesome food, the first of natural blessings, may be, and frequently *are* perverted from their legitimate and useful ends, to the purposes of excess, sensuality, and sin ; and terminate in disease, death, and the terrors of a future judgment. And so it is with our moral advantages. What crimes have not been perpetrated in the name of liberty, when it has been suffered to degenerate into licentiousness ! How often has charity become totally extinct, when prudence and frugality, passing their proper bounds, have grown into avarice and rapacity ! And

has not even *religion* itself been made a *curse* to mankind, when it has been corrupted by bigotry or fanaticism. It is fit that we should bear these things in mind when we come to the consideration of such propositions as those which are contained in the text; which establish a doctrine of the highest importance to us, and the most consistent with reason; but which is at the same time peculiarly liable to be misunderstood, and has often in fact produced the most lamentable errors.

This doctrine asserts absolutely the right of private judgment in the matter of religion, accompanied with a strong apostolic injunction to exert it. As this is a precept the truth of which cannot be disputed, but which requires great caution and moderation, when we come to reduce it to practice; my object will be to endeavour to explain the limitations and qualifications, which, in common with most general propositions, should be annexed to it, to make it a valuable or even a harmless rule of conduct. I am aware that they who would be most likely to make a good use of it, are precisely those by whom it is little, if at all, adopted; they preferring to trust implicitly in this matter to the ministers of that

Church to which they belong. They, on the other hand, who are most attached to the rule, are frequently apt to carry it too far, to neglect the cautions with which it should be surrounded ; and to draw conclusions from it equally prejudicial to themselves and to society.

Before I enter more particularly upon the discussion of this subject, it is proper to remark, that the sense which I affix to the Apostle's words is not precisely that which they conveyed to the Thessalonians. But it is a peculiarity of the Scriptures, and which gives them such inestimable value, that it frequently happens, that when their particular and original application has ceased, they retain a general signification, which will always continue to be profitable, *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. If we make this use of them, they will indeed prove themselves to be to us *the words of eternal life* : but if we do not, and still more if we pervert their true meaning by unskilful or irrational interpretation, we may contrive to *wrest them* (as we are told some did from the first) to our *own destruction*.

The sense then, which for any good purpose to ourselves, we must put upon the words of the text, I take to be this. By proving all things, we must understand that we are to examine the evidences of our faith, that is, the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures, by all the means in our power, and not to take them upon trust, or to receive them with a blind and implicit confidence. And then we are to ascertain what the doctrines are which they really contain : which can only be done by a diligent and frequent perusal of them, with the single purpose of discovering the truth, unbiassed by prejudice or interest : but with an earnest prayer to God, for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to guide us in that most important work. But this could not have been what St. Paul had in view when he wrote to the Thessalonians. The books whose genuineness and authenticity we have now to prove as the foundation of our faith, if then in existence, were probably not known to them : and still less that long list of writers whose reference to them forms a chain of historical evidence of their credibility upon which we now rely with the firmest confidence.— Instead of these, St. Paul was himself a living

witness of the truth of Christianity, having received it, as he himself declares repeatedly, by immediate Revelation from its Divine Author. Nor did he exhort the Thessalonians to prove the *doctrines* of Scripture in the same latitude in which we have to discharge that duty, because a great part of those doctrines is to be found only in his own Epistles to other Churches, with which they were unacquainted, and in the other writings which make up the body of the New Testament. His injunction to them must have been of a much more limited nature. By proving all things, he must have meant them to examine the truth of what he and other teachers of the religion of Jesus taught them, by all such means as were within their competence. He had just before charged them *not to despise prophesyings*: under which expression was comprehended nearly the whole of what he and they had to communicate to them. For to prophesy in the language of Scripture, signifies not only to foretell future events, but to declare any truth, whether predictive or not, by the inspiration of God<sup>1</sup>. Now it appears that

<sup>1</sup> Parkhurst's Lexicon.

in the infancy of Christianity, and for so long a period as was necessary to give it a firm foundation, many persons were endued, like St. Paul himself, with various spiritual gifts, such as miracles, prophecy, and many others, which he enumerates to the Corinthians. But then (as was natural) it happened, that some falsely pretended to have these gifts who really had them not. And for their detection, therefore, a special power was granted, called the *discerning of spirits*: or the ascertaining whether such a claim were well founded or not. To this the Apostle is supposed to allude when he says *despise not prophesyings*, as St. John does more distinctly in the fourth chapter of his first Epistle. *Beloved (says he) believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*— So St. Paul probably intended to caution the Thessalonians, not to neglect the true prophets, because there were some who were not so: but to examine carefully their pretensions, and to admit or reject them according as they agreed or not with those Christian principles which he himself delivered to them by undoubted inspiration. What they had

to prove therefore was, whether the predictions of the Old Testament had been really fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, and whether the doctrines which they heard relative to faith and practice were delivered by inspired men, that is, whether they were in conformity with the history and the discourses of our blessed Lord.

Such was the meaning of the text, as it applied to the Thessalonians. They had to enquire into the truth of transactions comparatively of very recent occurrence and of great publicity ; and to judge for themselves, whether persons with whom they conversed did or did not possess the supernatural endowments to which they laid claim. These were matters about which, one should think, they could not easily be deceived. And the chief difference between their case and our's is, that they lived so much nearer to the time when all these events happened than *we* do, and that *we* have to be satisfied (amongst other things) whether, in point of fact, they and so many others of that period were converted to Christianity as the Scriptures and other ecclesiastical histories relate. For when we are convinced that they were, our faith is almost



inevitably fixed. Since it is scarcely possible to account for their conversion upon any other supposition than the truth of all the matter contained in the New Testament.

And this brings us directly to the meaning of the text, as it relates to ourselves. By proving all things, we have, in the first place, to satisfy ourselves of the truth of the Scriptures, if we have any doubt upon that point: and then to prove it against those who deny it. And in the next place, we have to ascertain what are the doctrines which they really contain, and to defend them against those who give them a different interpretation. In the former consists our Christianity: in the latter our Protestantism according to our established Church. In the one we have to contend with Infidels of all descriptions: and in the other with Roman Catholics and Dissenters of all denominations. This is our Christian liberty, which will only be a blessing to us as we use it with firmness, with prudence, and with moderation. We may claim beyond contradiction, upon Apostolic authority, (says a recent commentator) the right for "all Christians, in all ages, before they receive any religious doctrine, to examine whether it be consonant

to right reason and the Word of God<sup>1</sup>.”—  
“What a glorious freedom of thought (exclaims another able writer) do the Apostles recommend! And how contemptible in their account is a blind and implicit faith! May all Christians use this liberty of judging for themselves in matters of religion, and allow it to one another and to all mankind<sup>2</sup>.”

It is upon this ground that we and other Protestants justify our separation from the Church of Rome, which absolutely denies this right of private judgment. And in like manner Dissenters vindicate their secession from us. Nor do we presume to dispute their claim so to do. So sacred and inalienable are the rights of conscience! So entirely are we bound to obey their dictates ourselves; and to respect their influence upon other men! The Romanists not being able to get rid of the text, which is a remarkably clear and strong one, endeavour to evade its force by saying that it applies only to the Clergy, or rather to the superiors of their Church, in whom, according to them, resides that infallibility to which

<sup>1</sup> Macknight upon the text.

<sup>2</sup> Benson, as quoted by Macknight.

all its members are bound implicitly to submit<sup>1</sup>. But this position is manifestly untenable. Had the injunction been found in an Epistle addressed to an individual, such as Timothy or Titus, who were themselves commissioned to teach the Gospel, there might have been some pretence for such an argument. But it was addressed to the Thessalonians at large, without any restriction to any particular descriptions of persons, and what it authorized them to do it is quite impossible to deny to any other body of Christians whatever.

The right then (it must be admitted) is one of the most absolute and general nature. But it is obviously one which demands great prudence and discretion in its exercise. We have all many natural rights, which we consent to abandon for the advantages of living in society<sup>2</sup>. And even of those which we retain, there are several which we seldom exert *ourselves*; preferring to trust to the

<sup>1</sup> The Apostle doth not here bid the *guides* of the Church try all things, and the people hold fast that which they delivered to them; but gives an injunction common to all *Christians, &c.*—WHITBY.

<sup>2</sup> Blackstone's Commentaries, vol. i. 125.

judgment of others who have more skill and knowledge in particular subjects than *we* have or *can* have. Thus we confide the care of our health to physicians, and others who have made diseases and their remedies the study of their lives. And the defence of our property and other interests to the members of the legal profession <sup>1</sup>. And so of many other things, in which we might if we pleased rely entirely upon our own judgment, but which we voluntarily and wisely prefer to commit to the management of others. And though I do not mean to contend that the case is exactly parallel with regard to religion; yet perhaps it makes a nearer approach to it than would at first sight appear. For as a prudent man would not willingly be so completely ignorant of either law or physic as not to know how to conduct himself with regard to his property, or his health, upon ordinary occasions; yet in great and difficult emergencies would naturally have recourse to those who were more skilled in such matters than himself: so it is with respect to religion: there is much in it which every man should study for himself,

<sup>1</sup> See Hey's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 32 and 98.

and to a certain extent form his own judgment upon it : but there is much also in it which he may reasonably think that they who devote their whole lives to its investigation are more accurately acquainted with than he is likely to be. But different men will prudently exercise this right in different degrees, according to the ability which by nature or education they possess for the subject. There are few, perhaps, who are not competent to perceive the truth of the moral precepts of the Gospel : though even of *these* there are some whose beauty and propriety it requires some reasoning fully to appreciate ; and others which demand some judgment to discriminate whether they should be obeyed in their letter or their spirit. But with respect to the evidences of Christianity, they obviously cannot be properly examined without a considerable share of learning and much ability in its application. But this is a work of great extent, not to be accomplished without much time, labour, and research. They therefore who, like Dr. Paley and others, have abridged the larger works of their predecessors upon this subject, given them a popular form, and exhibited their most material points in a clear

light, with force and brevity, have done an inestimable service to mankind ; and enabled multitudes to prove this part of religion, who, without such assistance, would hardly have undertaken, and much less have accomplished the task.

But there remains to be considered another most important branch of religion, to which though all are called upon to assent, few indeed are competent to prove ; and strictly speaking none are so : since it relates to things confessedly above human comprehension. I mean those points of our faith which are called mysterious, such for example as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and some others. Should it be said, where is the necessity for assenting to that which it is admitted we cannot understand ? I should answer nearly in the words of a late most learned, impartial, and candid defender and expounder of our articles. That it is for the sake of forming a religious society, by associating as many as can agree *so far* as to use the same form of worship and instruction, and to abstain from all disputes. The object of such a society is the maintenance of religion itself, which without it could hardly be supported. Hence almost

every wise and good man connects himself with some such society ; with that with which his own particular opinions most nearly accord : though probably almost every man finds it necessary to submit his own judgment in some points to that of the general body to which he belongs, without which he would find it difficult or impossible to unite with them in religious worship. The great point of union in our Church consists in our articles, the object of which is thus explained by the author to whom I have just alluded. He says, “ without them we could not have one body of doctrine taught to all the people, and that we want such unity to keep men from dissensions. But where (he continues) is the great good of keeping men from dissensions ? because while they are disputing and doubting, their principles are unsettled, and they cannot have right religious sentiments. And what is the great importance of their having right sentiments ? because from their sentiments men act <sup>1</sup>.” Thus he shews the influence which our belief, even of unintelligible points of doctrine, has upon our conduct ; with which it

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 2.

would not appear at first sight to have any connection. We regulate it by the general principles of the society to which we belong ; but we could not belong to it without agreeing with it in all matters upon which we had reflected and been convinced ; and submitting our judgment to it in others which lie beyond our comprehension. Such was the conduct of the able and excellent man himself whom I have been quoting. Though he explained and defended all the articles of our Church with admirable learning and sagacity, yet he was far from pretending that he thoroughly comprehended them all. In speaking upon that of the Trinity he professes, “in the most unequivocal manner, that he does not understand it.” He admits, that he “uses words without ideas.” He pretends “only to unite the different sayings of Scripture in the best manner he can, though, in a manner confessedly imperfect : but this imperfection he adopts lest he should run into a greater evil, by putting a forced and wrong construction on Scriptural sayings, in order to reduce them to the level of his own human capacity<sup>1</sup>.”—

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 251.



With such an example before us we may surely say, that the injunction of the text to *prove all things*, and the right of private judgment founded upon it, are perfectly consistent with submission to the opinions of a long series of learned men upon mysterious points of faith, and the judgment of our Church upon controverted doctrines, which are in their own nature almost interminable.

Such was the opinion of another most able and learned man, who lived at the period of the Reformation, and who was as well entitled as any man could be to set up his own judgment in such matters, and to retain it, rather than to surrender it to that of any body of men whatever. I allude to Erasmus, who, in speaking of some of the disputed doctrines of that day, says, "there is nothing wherein I acquiesce more securely than in the assured judgments of the Church. Of reasonings and arguments there is no end<sup>1</sup>." It is true that for this sentiment his admirer and biographer, Dr. Jortin, is disposed to censure him. But I think without sufficient cause. For he ob-

<sup>1</sup> Jortin's Life of Erasmus, vol. i. p. 429.

jects to it in this manner. He says, “ by reasoning justly we arrive at truth ; and by implicit belief in the decisions of others, without examination, we take the way to fall into error.” But it appears to me, that Erasmus is speaking only of matters above reason ; and which reason therefore cannot determine : and where our only alternatives are perpetual disputes on the one hand, or, on the other, not a blind submission to, but a justifiable confidence in the judgment of others, and those of great number, learning, and weight, who we may well believe, have made as near an approach to the truth upon the particular subject, as the nature of the case admits ; and against whose opinion no individual can oppose his own, without great hazard at least of presumption and error. Except it can be maintained, that there are in religion no doctrines of this description, none upon which we cannot arrive at absolute certainty, by a process of just reasoning, I see not how the conclusion can be avoided, that to live in peace with each other, which is one great end of Christianity itself, we *must* be content, upon points of faith which transcend the power of

the human understanding, to acquiesce in the decision of the great body of the Church to which we belong : remembering always, that *that* Church does not claim for itself that infallibility, which it denies to every other : conscious that at present we can know only in part those things which hereafter shall be more fully revealed.

From what has been said, the application of the latter part of the text, *hold fast that which is good*, becomes easy and obvious.— We shall certainly do right to adhere steadfastly to these three things. First, the evidences of Christianity, upon which rests our belief in its truth in general. Secondly, its points of faith as received by our Church, by which we are connected with that particular branch of it established in these kingdoms.— And lastly, its rules of practice, by which we should regulate our lives, in order to attain that *holiness without which none shall see the Lord*.

We should rely upon the evidences of Christianity, because almost the whole of the civilized world has now trusted to them for nearly two thousand years, and it is scarcely

possible to conceive, that had there been any error or defect in them, it would not before this have been detected and exposed. And because if we were to abandon it, its place could be supplied by no system to which any rational man could give any credence, or which could at all promote our happiness either in this world or in the next.

We should continue to receive with reverence those points of faith, which our Church has sanctioned after the most mature deliberation, because it is hopeless to expect that any further light will be shed upon those mysterious subjects, except the Almighty should, in his wisdom and goodness, deign to accord a further Revelation to mankind. Because those points of faith, though confessedly far removed from our comprehension, are not on that account the less likely to be true. Since we are surrounded on all sides, with objects submitted to our senses, whose origin, nature, and secret properties, defy our utmost sagacity to penetrate. The mystery of the Creation is more inconceivable by us, than that of our Redemption. The union of our souls and bodies is as inexplicable by reason, as the doctrine of the Trinity.

But above all, we should persevere in the practice of all those great moral duties, which were commanded and exemplified by our blessed Saviour himself. Without this, vain is our profession of our belief in his religion, either in its evidences or its doctrines. “The greatest heresy in the world (says Archbishop Tillotson) is a wicked life—and God will sooner forgive a man a hundred defects of his understanding, than one fault of his will<sup>1</sup>.”—So true is this, that he whose life is at variance with the laws of the Gospel, can hardly be sincere in his profession of its faith; and therefore frequently adds to his other sins, that of hypocrisy, the most odious of all vices, and that which was most frequently and most severely reprehended by its Divine Author.—He who treats the Christian morality lightly, in comparison with its mysteries, affords a very suspicious proof of his sincerity; and holds out a doctrine, very encouraging to the weakness and depravity of human nature.—Let us *hold fast* therefore that which is really *good*, the example and the precepts of Jesus Christ. The more constantly we adhere to

<sup>1</sup> Works, vol. i. Sermon 34.

these, the more evidently will it appear that we have obeyed the Apostle's injunction to *prove all things* necessary for our salvation, so far as the infirmity of our present condition will permit; and the more confidently may we look for the reward of our obedience, in the promised blessings of the life to come.

## SERMON XV.

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HEBREWS x. 23.

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering : for he is faithful that promised.*

IT is remarkable that this reading in the original, stands upon the authority of but one manuscript, all the others literally translated would require, instead of "the profession of our faith," the profession of hope<sup>1</sup>; but the Scriptural sense of faith and hope is so nearly the same, that our translators may well be excused for adopting the former, though the latter should perhaps in strictness have been preferred, as having the greater weight of authorities in its favour. But taken either way, we cannot help being struck with the necessity for such an exhortation from an

<sup>1</sup> Slade's Annotations on the Epistles.

Apostle, in that early stage of Christianity; when its history was so recent, and its miraculous attestation had not yet been withdrawn. If such an injunction could have been *then* called for, can we wonder if in every subsequent period of our religion, it has been still more imperiously required; and that at the present moment it demands our attention as powerfully as ever? If its evidence from the first was not of that kind, which was absolutely irresistible; for even of those who witnessed the miracles, some we know were not convinced by them, but ascribed them to demoniacal agency—must not the great length of time which has elapsed since its establishment. add *some* strength to real difficulties, and lend some plausibility even to captious objections? It is difficult indeed to conceive what evidence would have satisfied those whom the miracles could not convince: but it is quite clear that the proofs must have been very powerful, which enabled it to succeed to the extent which it did; namely, of superseding in a great degree the Mosaic economy, and of supplanting entirely Gentile superstition. However, the fact undoubtedly is, that from the days of the Apostles to our own, notwith-



standing the unrivalled excellence of our religion, the weight of its evidence, its extensive influence upon our happiness *here*, and its sole foundation of our hopes *hereafter*; there always have been and still are those who reject it altogether, and probably still more whose faith is of that wavering description, against which the Apostle cautions his Hebrew converts. It can never therefore be unimportant to examine temperately any of the objections which are urged against our faith, that we may *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us.*

A very able modern defender of Christianity, Dr. Paley, infers the probability of a Revelation from God from its necessity; and contends that as miracles are the only means by which such a communication can be authenticated to mankind, they are to be considered as credible, exactly in proportion as a Revelation is probable<sup>1</sup>. But the professed Infidel denies both these positions. He asserts that the light of nature is sufficient in all respects for our guidance, and consequently

<sup>1</sup> Evidences, vol. i. p. 3, &c.

that a Revelation is quite unnecessary. And he affirms that no human testimony can render a miracle credible. Now certainly if these propositions could be supported by any copious induction of facts, or by any very powerful arguments, Christianity must be shaken to its foundation; and our only enquiry would be, what sort of religion these its determined antagonists had to substitute in its place? But so far as I have seen, they are totally unprepared upon these points: their assertions are indeed confident enough, but their proofs miserably deficient. When they tell us that the light of nature is sufficient for all the purposes of religion, we should expect at least that they should refer us to some period, or to some people, who have found it so. That they should shew us some fundamental principles, which have been very generally, if not universally admitted, and that these cannot be traced to any Divine Revelation. But unfortunately facts are directly opposed to them. Every religion of which history informs us, is built upon some real or supposed Revelation, and not upon mere principles of reason, drawn from the light of nature only. And they probably have all a common

origin in that primary Revelation, of which the Bible is the only existing record ; though varied and corrupted by imperfect tradition, and the great revolutions to which all human affairs have been constantly liable.

But not to lose ourselves in too wide a field, let us consider what was the religion (if it can be so termed) of the two greatest and wisest nations, with whose history we are acquainted, the Greeks and Romans. I mean of course before the Christian era. If it be true, as is pretended, that God has at all times given mankind sufficient means of knowing whatever he requires of them, surely we shall find some traces of that knowledge, in the religious institutions of those highly cultivated nations. And if it be clear, that natural and revealed religion, having the same end, their precepts must be the same, we should certainly expect to find an agreement, between the precepts of what we believe to be revealed religion, and the moral principles of these celebrated people, amongst whom natural reason exerted its utmost force. But if they were diametrically opposed to each other, so far from being the *same*, they could not by possibility *both be true*. Now whether we take the account of

their opinions and manners from themselves, or from the Apostles and other Christian writers, nothing can be more evident, than the direct contrast which they afford to the doctrines of the Gospel. The disgusting pictures which St. Paul has left us of the state of the heathen world, are too well known to need repetition. And it has been justly remarked by an able modern commentator, that "the description which the Apostle hath given of the national manners of the Greeks, however disgraceful to human nature, *being perfectly true*, merits attention: because it is a complete confutation of those who contend, that natural reason hath always been sufficient, to lead mankind to just notions in religion, and to a proper moral conduct. For after the weakness of human reason, in matters of religion and morality, hath been so clearly demonstrated by experience, in the case of the Greeks, who, of all mankind, were the most distinguished for their intellectual endowments, the futile pretence of the sufficiency of the light of nature, set up by modern infidels, for the purpose of rendering Revelation needless, should be rejected with the contempt due

to so gross a falsehood <sup>1</sup>." If it should be said that similar vices have at all times also been practised by many who call themselves Christians; the answer is clear and obvious—that they have been practised in *opposition* to their religion, whilst in the case of the heathen, the so much boasted light of nature does not appear to have been sufficient to point out their deformity, even to the wisest amongst them <sup>2</sup>. What Cicero has said with reference to certain of their opinions, may be applied very generally to their whole system of morals and divinity,—that there is no absurdity, which has not been maintained by some philosopher <sup>3</sup>. And if such was the case with the philosophers, what must it have been with the people at large? If so feeble and uncertain was the light of nature, in the brightest period of the history of the world, and amongst those most distinguished for their excellence in all the arts and sciences: how much more deficient would it be found, were we to turn our attention to less civilized nations, and to that state of barbarism

<sup>1</sup> Macknight's View and Illustrations of Romans, c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. on Romans i. 27.

<sup>3</sup> De Divinatione, lib. ii. 68.

in which they were all originally found, and in which, nevertheless, if the notion of natural religion be well founded, we have a right to expect at least to discover its elementary principles.

Some persons have endeavoured to evade the difficulty, arising from the absurdities of heathen superstitions, by saying that though they were practised, they were not believed, except by the people. "I am willing (says the able writer whom I have already quoted) to accept the account of the matter which is given by Mr. Gibbon: that the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful<sup>1</sup>." And yet if natural religion be what it is represented to be, so far from this description of it being just, its principles should be so evidently true, so founded (as they say) in the relations of things, that all classes of persons, the wisest and the most uninformed, should have a perfect agreement and understanding about them. I should not think it necessary to say so much

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. i. p. 36.

upon this point, were the argument of the sufficiency of natural religion only employed by Infidel writers, for the purpose of discrediting Revelation : but the truth is that it is a weapon, unadvisedly, as I think, put into their hands, by many very sincere and able believers and defenders of Christianity : and as might be expected they have not failed to make good use of it. We must not defer too implicitly to the authority of any names, however ancient, eminent, or respectable. Time, which so evidently brings improvement into many other things, is not wholly unfruitful upon the subject of religion. Amongst our older writers<sup>1</sup>, who are deservedly of great weight, this notion of the agreement between the principles of natural and revealed religion, is very prevalent. And probably it is from observing the advantage which their adversaries have taken of this concession, and indeed the great difficulty of satisfactorily refuting the arguments which they have drawn from it, that modern writers have reflected more deeply upon the matter, and have found good reason to question the existence of any thing,

<sup>1</sup> Wollaston and others.

that can properly be called *natural religion*, and to trace all our just ideas of God and his Providence, and of our duties both to him and to each other, to those two great Revelations, which are contained in the Bible<sup>1</sup>. Not that reason, when at all enlightened, does not afford us many clear intimations of what is right and wrong ; nor that conscience is not in general a very faithful monitor, and a safe guide for our conduct : but that reason *alone* is quite unable to establish the great fundamental principles of religion : and that conscience frequently requires to be controlled, by positive precepts which rest upon Divine authority. Were this otherwise, had God enabled us by the light of nature and reason only to frame a true system of religion, though it would not invalidate any positive proofs which we might have of an actual Revelation having been vouchsafed to us, it would certainly destroy the strong argument for such Revelation, founded upon its utility or necessity. It would afford much support to the reasonings of those who dispute the

<sup>1</sup> See the Review of Bishop Gleig's Letters on Theology in the *British Critic* for October, 1827.



truth of Revelation. It would be extremely difficult to comprehend, why the Almighty should so frequently have disturbed the general laws of nature; and have performed such mighty prodigies for the establishment of true religion in the world, if he had already accomplished the same end, by more simple and equally efficacious means.

And this will lead me to notice (but very shortly) that other objection of professed unbelievers, that no testimony is sufficient to prove a miracle. It is not my intention now to repeat the general arguments in proof of the Christian miracles, but simply to reply to this specific objection, which, if it be well founded, overthrows at once both the miracles and the religion. For they rest precisely upon the same grounds, and are inseparably connected. And it would not be a little extraordinary, if the religion which could only have been founded upon the belief of their performance, established by the testimony of numerous eye-witnesses, could after the lapse of eighteen centuries be destroyed, not by the production of evidence or arguments to disprove their performance, but simply by the assertion that they were originally unworthy

of credit. For the possibility of the miracles is not denied—that there was an adequate cause for them, is not disputed—neither the motives nor the characters of the witnesses to them are impeached—but it is nevertheless contended, that they upon whom they were performed, ought not to have been believed, when they asserted the fact at the hazard of their lives, and sealed its truth with their blood. I think it sufficient to let one of these reply for himself. St. John relates the history of a man who was born blind, but to whom sight was imparted by our Saviour.— The Jews were unwilling to believe this, and consulted his parents upon the subject. They being afraid of the Pharisees, contented themselves with affirming that he was born blind, and referring them to their son, for an account of the manner in which he acquired sight.— Not that the Pharisees doubted the fact, but they would not allow that Jesus had been the author of it. *Give God the praise* (said they) *we know that this man is a sinner.* His answer has an air of nature and truth about it, that is quite irresistible. *Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.* And

the conversation was continued in the same natural and artless strain. *They said to him again, What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already and ye did not hear: Wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him and said, thou art his disciple: but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow we know not whence he is. The man answered and said unto them—Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened my eyes. Since the world began, was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God he could do nothing.*

Such is the difference between the honest simplicity of a plain man, and the overweening conceit of a subtle philosopher. Testimony however extraordinary may be supported by facts. The religion of Mahomet exists, and no one doubts that he was the founder of it. So the religion of Jesus exists, nor can it be denied that it began with him. Yet this might almost as well be disputed as the miracles. There is, and there never has, been but

one account of the matter. The miracles and all the other facts of our Lord's history are so interwoven, that it is almost impossible to separate them. From the first his pretensions had nothing else to stand upon. The belief that he was the Messiah, could only be founded upon the supernatural power displayed by him. But for this (as it has been well observed) he "could not have excited so much *as a doubt* amongst the Jews, whether he was the person in whom a long series of ancient prophecies terminated<sup>1</sup>." By this he convinced a sufficient number of his countrymen, to enable them to lay a foundation for the conversion of almost all the then known world. *Their* testimony *was* believed which we are now told *ought* to have been rejected. That falsehood which is now declared to be apparent, could not be detected, when the events to which it related were still recent.—The Christian miracles were credited upon a principle laid down by the author himself, to whom I have been alluding. "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless it be of such a kind, that its falsehood

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. i. p. 111.

would be more improbable than the fact which it endeavours to establish<sup>1</sup>." Such appears to have been the case of the Evangelists.— They had ample means of knowing the truth of what they have related. Much of it is of a kind about which they *could* not be deceived themselves; and no one has yet been able to discover any motive, which they could have had for wishing to deceive the world. If they did not suffer martyrdom in support of their veracity, they must at least have incurred great danger of that fate, which their Divine Master and so many of their successors underwent. If testimony under these circumstances cannot be relied upon, it is extremely difficult to conceive when it can safely be trusted.— The miracles themselves are not more wonderful than the reception which the Gospel met with, supposing it to have been founded in error or falsehood.

But there are some persons, who, without imputing the origin of our religion to deception, have yet not *so firm* a faith in it as it deserves, and as they themselves would wish to have. This probably arises from expecting

<sup>1</sup> Hume's Essays, vol. ii. p. 121.

more *certainty* in its evidence, than the nature of the case admits; or from finding difficulties in the Scriptures which they are unable satisfactorily to solve. That neither of these forms sufficient ground for wavering in our faith is certain. For faith is different from knowledge. "Their grounds (says Locke) are so far from being the same, or having any thing common, that when it is brought to certainty, faith is destroyed; 'tis knowledge then and faith no longer<sup>1</sup>." The truth of Christianity is a matter not of knowledge but of probability<sup>2</sup>. And the grounds of probability, according to the great authority I have just quoted, are but two. First, "the conformity of any thing with our own knowledge, observation, or experience." This applies *in part* only to the history contained in the Gospels, in which there are confessedly many things which do not accord with our knowledge or experience. But secondly, "the testimony of others," which applies to the whole case. And in that testimony, we have

<sup>1</sup> Reply to the Bishop of Worcester—Works, vol. i. 410.

<sup>2</sup> See Chillingworth's Religion of Protestants, p. 31.

every thing which is required, to enable us to rely upon it with confidence. Such as “the number, the integrity, and the skill of the witnesses. The consistency of their relation, and the want of contrary testimonies<sup>1</sup>.”— Still this falls short of demonstration, of which a religion built upon historical facts is not capable. It is true, that Bishop Warburton has called his work upon the Divine Legation of Moses, “a demonstration;” but he almost ridicules the idea, that any one should have supposed that he could have meant by it more than a moral demonstration, or an argument founded upon probabilities<sup>2</sup>. But although the truth of Christianity rests upon historical, and therefore only probable evidence, but of a very high degree of strength: still the matter of it or its doctrines have no want of certainty. When we are satisfied that they were revealed by the Almighty, they become the subjects of that “faith, which as absolutely determines our minds, and as perfectly excludes all *wavering*, as our knowledge it-

<sup>1</sup> Locke's Works, vol. i. p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 205.

self: for we may as well doubt of our own being, as we can, whether any Revelation from God be true<sup>1</sup>.”

But then the difficulties which occur in the Scriptures, abate perhaps the confidence of some persons in their fidelity. Some of these are of a kind which yield to examination and reflection: and form proper subjects for the study of the Clergy, (though not exclusively for them) and for their discourses from this place. Others are in their very nature quite insuperable, relating to matters to which our present faculties cannot reach. These are in the strictest sense, the objects of faith. We receive them as truths, revealed from heaven, without comprehending them. They to whom they were originally revealed, did not pretend perfectly to understand them. St. Paul confessed that he saw *through a glass darkly*, and that he knew *but in part*. And he declared that *without doubt, great was the mystery of godliness*. But this is no better ground for disbelieving religion, than it would be for universal Scepticism. For what subject is there which does not present to us invinci-

<sup>1</sup> Locke's Works, vol. i. p. 315.



ble difficulties? We know just enough of every thing, to perceive that there is much of which we are entirely ignorant. “Hoc tantum scio, quod nescio<sup>1</sup>,” is the proper language of human infirmity. The Deity is hardly a greater mystery to man, than man is to himself. But it forms no impediment to the exercise of any of our faculties, that we do not perceive the mode of their operation.— We believe firmly in the existence of our minds, though we are utterly unconscious of their nature and essence. We cannot doubt (as has been well observed) the agency and operation of many things, which are imperceptible by our senses. “The great powers of nature are all invisible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetism, though constantly present, and constantly exerting their influence; though within us, near us, and about us; though diffused through all space, overspreading the surface, or penetrating the contexture of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend upon substances and actions, which are totally concealed from our senses. The Supreme Intelligence is so himself<sup>2</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Jerome to Paulinus in his Prefaces to the Vulgate.

<sup>2</sup> Paley's Evidences, vol. ii. p. 414.

But it is a ground not for distrust, but for confidence, that there *is* an analogy between what Revelation teaches, and what nature discloses. In both light is blended with darkness. Of both we know enough for the purposes of our present existence : yet we see clearly that much remains behind, which a future existence can alone enable us to comprehend. This, the Scriptures unequivocally hold out to us. And if *he that is faithful hath promised* it : he that is omnipotent will assuredly perform it. Let us repose then upon this great truth, but not content ourselves with simply professing it as an article of our faith, but make it a vital principle of our conduct. Were it really so, all exhortations to virtue would be nearly superfluous. The strongest temptations to vice, which *this world* can present to us, would sink into insignificance, were we thoroughly persuaded of the certainty of *another*. But whilst our actions contradict this persuasion, there must be some lurking doubt in our minds upon this awful subject, which it becomes us above all things to set at rest. That these reflections may tend to that salutary end, or suggest to your own minds more powerful arguments

in support of this great doctrine of our holy Faith, may God of his infinite mercy grant, to whom with the Son and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all power and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for ever.

## SERMON XVI.

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ROMANS x. 10.

*With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*

IN my last discourse, I endeavoured to shew the insufficiency of some of the principal grounds of infidelity or scepticism, which have been formerly urged, or may be at present entertained, to the prejudice of our holy religion. I selected some of the strongest that I have met with—not that minor objections are not entitled to consideration—but that if those which are the most powerful cannot be supported, those which are of inferior importance must of necessity fail. But there is one of a different kind from those which I have noticed, which applies not so much to the evidences or the doctrines of Christianity, as to the minds of those to whom they are proposed for acceptance. It is frequently

said, that “to believe or not to believe them, is not a matter of choice but necessity. That faith not depending upon the will is not a duty; and if not a duty, there can be no righteousness in it. That to believe a proposition without a reasonable proof, is not in the power of a reasonable creature; nor is it in his power to reject what has such proof, as soon as he discerns it<sup>1</sup>.”

I have stated this objection in its full force, because I have no desire to evade it, but to meet it fairly and examine it dispassionately. For I am satisfied, that notwithstanding its plausible appearance, it contains a considerable fallacy, the detection of which must serve to confirm our faith. It belongs to that class of errors which are peculiarly dangerous, because they contain a mixture of truth. It *is* true to a certain extent—but it is *not* true in any degree, when applied to the evidences or the doctrines of our religion.

From propositions which admit of demonstration, we cannot withhold our assent when

<sup>1</sup> This is a very common objection, and from very different descriptions of persons. But I take it from a book written in the last century, and noticed by Bishop Warburton, called *Supernaturals Examined*, by a Dr. Morgan.

we perceive their proof. But even of *these* it is in our power to have a very firm belief without understanding them ; that is, without that reasonable proof which is contended to be essential to our belief of them. In geometry, in astronomy, and in all the other sciences, how many propositions are there upon whose truth multitudes have the firmest reliance, not grounded upon their own knowledge, but upon that of other men, of whose competency to examine such subjects, and of whose veracity in reporting the result of their investigations, they can entertain no doubt ! But in matters of religion which depend upon probability only, and in which our enquiries terminate in faith and not in knowledge, the conclusions of our minds are affected by other than those strict rules which govern them upon subjects which admit of demonstration. They are influenced in fact by the affections. They admit of *prejudice* either in favour of or against them. It is not simply the judgment, but the feelings also which enter into our conclusions. And this is what I understand the Apostle to mean, when he says that it is *with the heart that men believe unto righteousness*. I am aware that these words

have usually been interpreted somewhat differently, as meaning merely that a true faith *does* influence the will and the affections.— This is no doubt true. But as that is a doctrine that pervades the whole of the New Testament, and is expressed in various ways: whereas I do not recollect any other instance of a proposition very similar to that of the text, I think we may be justified in giving it a more extensive, and, a more literal sense: namely, that the affections of the heart operate as a *cause* of our belief, and not merely as a *consequence* of it.

That this is true, not only as applied to religion, but also to other things, I have no doubt. It is a common but a just observation, that we willingly believe what we wish to be true. And it is not less so, that we readily reject what we are not disposed to believe. Suppose a tale of deep distress to be related with all its circumstances to a stranger of a humane and compassionate disposition, accompanied perhaps with many arguments to induce him to contribute to its relief. He gives it at least a patient hearing, he considers the probability and consistency of the story: and if these are not very suspicious, the last

thing that would enter his mind, would be to question its truth. But suppose all this to be related to a man of a different description, to one of an unfeeling and uncharitable temper—he will scarcely give it any attention, he fixes at once upon what he conceives to be its improbabilities; he enters not at all into the feelings or arguments of the narrator, but hastily concludes the whole to be an imposture.—Now the grounds of belief in both these instances are precisely the same, and it is the *heart* and not the *judgment* only which obtains credit for it in the one case, and not in the other. And I believe that it cannot be disputed, that this is no unfaithful representation of human nature in general; and that the operation of the same principle might be traced in many other ways.

But be this as it may—that the heart has a considerable share in every thing that relates both to the belief and the practice of religion, is the clear doctrine both of the Old and the New Testaments. The passages to prove this are exceedingly numerous. In the language of Solomon, the heart and the understanding seem to be almost identified. *The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the*



*mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. Again—the preparations or the disposition of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And again—the heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.* In the New Testament our Saviour addresses himself more to the feelings and the affections, than to the reasoning faculties of his hearers. He laid the foundation for the reception of the Gospel in that disposition, which he compared to the docility of children, a willingness to be taught, and to receive instruction upon the authority of the teacher. He called also for *repentance*, or that reformation of life, without which his doctrines can with difficulty make their way to the understanding. For there can be no greater bar to the belief of Christianity, than an evil life and corrupted affections. *Out of the heart* (says our Saviour) *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies.* Where these things have dominion, his pure precepts cannot gain admittance. They are set in direct opposition to each other. They almost make it a man's interest *not* to believe. For I have no doubt that in a great majority of

cases, vice is not so much the consequence of infidelity, as the cause of it. It is no easy matter to eradicate bad habits, and to bring a person who is under their influence to a sober and impartial examination of the truths of religion. But let his course of profligacy receive a check, let him be cast upon a sick-bed, let his life be brought into peril by his crimes—and reflection forces itself upon him: that which he had hitherto doubted or disbelieved, or perhaps not thought of at all, now presents itself in a new light. The feelings of his heart, which before disposed him to infidelity, are now engaged the other way. The sense of calamity opens his eyes, and he becomes a firm believer of that religion, which hitherto he had neglected or despised. This is no imaginary picture; it has been repeatedly realized, and the sincerity of the conviction so produced established beyond all question. It may be said that in such cases, *fear* has great influence, and that nothing can be concluded from them either way, with respect to the truth of Christianity. But I am not using them for this purpose: but merely to shew that the affections *are* concerned in producing or in withholding belief, and that much more

is in our own power, in determining the matter, than the argument which I am disputing will allow.

But not only do those vices which corrupt the heart dispose it to infidelity, but it is susceptible of impressions which may lead a man to the same fearful conclusion, who so far from being decidedly vicious, may have even a very good moral character. Its pride, its vanity, its conceit, may be such as to create such a prejudice against religion, as will not suffer the arguments in its favour to have their due weight. This appears to have been very strikingly the case with Mr. Hume, against whose moral character I do not know that any serious imputations have been urged.— So blinded was he by prejudice against Christianity, that the principal if not the *only* case in which he would not allow miracles to be credible, was precisely that in which *alone* we can conceive them to be employed, namely, for the proof and the establishment of religion. These are his own words: “We may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any system of religion.” And he adds—“I beg

the limitation here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own that otherwise there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature of such a kind, as to admit of proof from human testimony<sup>1</sup>." For what other purposes than for the proof of religion he could conceive miracles to be performed, as he has not informed us, it is impossible to conjecture. But there can be no doubt (as has been well observed) that his principle, if true, would lead directly to this general conclusion: "That it is impossible for God Almighty to give a Revelation, attended with such evidence, that it can be reasonably believed in after ages; or even in the same age, by any person who hath not been an eye-witness of the miracles by which it is supported<sup>2</sup>." But not satisfied, as it should seem, with his own argument, or apprehensive that it would not bear examination, he advances a step farther, and wishes his readers not so much as to listen to any thing that can be urged against it. "As the violations of truth

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Miracles.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell on Miracles.

are more common (he says) in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact (a point of which he is positive, though he produces neither facts nor arguments to support it), this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretext it may be covered." Notwithstanding all this, strange to say, he was unwilling to be considered an infidel writer. In a letter to Dr. Blair, he says—"I could wish your friend had not denominated me an infidel writer, on account of ten or twelve pages which seem to him to have that tendency: while I have written so many volumes on history, literature, politics, trade, and morals, which in that particular at least, are entirely inoffensive<sup>1</sup>." There is something so exceedingly absurd in this sort of apology, that it leaves us in doubt whether our most charitable conclusion should be, that this celebrated philosopher had an "evil heart of unbelief," which perverted his judgment; or merely a weakness of intellect, when he

<sup>1</sup> In Dr. Campbell's Preface.

handled a subject so foreign to his usual studies and pursuits as that of religion, which is not discoverable in his other works.

That the heart should have no share in determining our belief of religion, must appear very extraordinary, when we consider what influence was ascribed to it by our Saviour himself, in producing conviction upon those whom he addressed. This he strikingly illustrated by the parable of the sower; which teaches that its first reception was almost entirely owing to that cause. The seed represented the word of God, or the doctrines of Christianity. The sower, himself, or the evidence by which they were supported. The different sorts of ground, the different characters and dispositions of those who were called upon to receive them. Now it is evident that these relate to the qualities of the heart, and not to the powers of the understanding. For they who received it by the way-side, are clearly those upon whom it made no impression whatever. This, I admit, may be applied either to their feelings, or to their judgment. But secondly, they who received it on the rock are they upon whom it made indeed but a slight impression, but who are said to have

received it with *joy*, which shews that their *affections* were interested in its reception. In the third case, when it fell amongst thorns, its influence was counteracted by all those worldly propensities which could hardly have impeded its growth, had its root been planted only in the *mind*. But the last instance of the *good ground* sets the matter completely at rest. For that, we are expressly told, is descriptive of those who in *an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

If we follow the progress of Christianity, we shall find in it a confirmation of the doctrine of the text. The converts of the Apostles, like those of their Divine Master, were generally (though not exclusively) drawn from those classes, who are guided by their *feelings*, and in very many instances most properly guided by them. *Where is the wise? (says St. Paul) where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? And again—For ye see, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the*

*world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.* All this is intelligible, if we understand by the *wise*, sophisticated reasoners and interested and prejudiced opposers of the Gospel. But if the real truth was with *them*, and their adversaries were the willing or the unwilling dupes of imposture, the matter (to say the least of it) has no parallel in the history of the world. If we go on to the time when the Roman Empire became Christian, the same impression, that the feelings of mankind contributed greatly to that event, remains in full force. Of the five causes assigned for it by Mr. Gibbon, the second, and the fourth, namely, “The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth : and the pure and austere morals of the Christians<sup>1</sup> :” appear to me to be the most probable and the most influential. But these are considerations with which the *reason* has little to do. With respect to the *former*, it never

<sup>1</sup> Decline and Fall, c. xv.



did, nor ever can, establish that doctrine upon any grounds of certainty. And if it operate upon us as a motive to good conduct, it must be through the passions of hope and fear, which it may excite in our bosoms. And with respect to the latter, the observation of the virtues of one set of men, may indeed dispose others to their imitation, and so prepare *the heart to believe unto righteousness*, but in no other way can it be conceived to promote the reception of any religious doctrines whatever.

I trust that it now appears, that faith is more a matter of choice than some persons will allow. That to believe, or not to believe, is more in our power than they suppose. It would be strange indeed if it were not.—Throughout the Scriptures much merit and efficacy are ascribed to faith. But how can this be, if our will is not concerned in it? That there have been, and are, believers in Christianity, cannot be denied. If they have been so only from necessity, what merit can attach to them on account of their faith? If that be so, the enthusiast and the infidel are in *this* respect at least agreed. For both the

Deist and the Calvinist assure us, that faith can only be an act of necessity : though the conclusions which they draw from that principle are so different—the one being that it depends entirely upon the operation of our own minds, over which we have no control ; and the other ascribing it solely to the irresistible grace of God.

Of the believers in Christianity, from its first introduction to the present hour, how small a proportion has ever been able to estimate the weight of the evidence in its favour ! that is, to have that reasonable proof of its truth upon which *alone*, it is contended, faith in it can be founded ! That multitudes have thus believed, and do still continue to believe it, is indisputable. What is it that determines their belief ? Certainly not the decisions of their own judgments, nor *solely* their reliance upon that of other men. But the influence which its precepts have upon their *hearts*, to which no other system of religion or morals, which has ever been offered to the world, can lay claim. Its unrivalled excellence in this respect, is indeed fully admitted, even by those who doubt its Divine Authority, and

reject its mysterious doctrines<sup>1</sup>. Even with *them*, to a certain extent it is believed, from the hold which it has upon their feelings and affections.

We have seen that from the first, prejudice might be strong enough to resist the clearest evidence in its favour: and that ever since, *that cause* and vicious inclinations have operated powerfully to the same end. And on the other hand, that it addressed itself originally to the best emotions of the heart, and in proportion as these abound, it is still cherished with the most perfect sincerity, and the most undoubting confidence: as any one who has observed its influence upon *that sex*, whose feelings are the most acute, and whose affections are the most pure, will readily acknowledge. How then can it be said to be independent of the will? If it were a matter of abstract science, this would be true, but to a very limited extent. For (as I have said) many believe even propositions of that kind, more from the testimony of others than from

<sup>1</sup> This is strikingly illustrated in the case of the late President Jefferson. See his Correspondence, vol. iii. 515, &c.; and vol. iv. 227, &c.

their own perception of their truth. But faith is now a very complex consideration. The evidence and the doctrines, and we may add, the effects of Christianity, can no longer be separated. These mutually affect and support each other. If we find in it doctrines of the utmost importance, the most evident utility, and the most extensive influence; yet beyond the power of reason to determine, such as that of a future state: we must allow that they add greatly to the probability of the evidence in its favour. If its precepts appear to be congenial with the best dispositions of our nature, calling them forth where they lie dormant, or obstructed by vice: promoting their growth where they have taken root: and thus contributing to our happiness and that of those around us: our faith will spring from our virtues, and we shall no longer doubt, that *with the heart we may believe unto righteousness.*

But should any still be unconvinced by these arguments, let them reflect that neither infidelity nor scepticism have yet been able to prove that our religion is founded in error. There remains even with *their* advocates, a possibility that it may be true. Let this con-

sideration have its due weight, and it must satisfy them that their feelings *are* not, and *ought* not, in the strictest reason, to be uninterested in this question. If they felt that the existence of all which they hold dear upon earth would depend to-morrow upon a possible, though perhaps, not a very probable contingency ; would they be perfectly easy under such circumstances ? on the contrary, as the hour approached that was to determine their fate, would not their anxiety become intense ; and what had once appeared to be but possible, assume a very fearful aspect of probability ? Let them be assured that this is precisely their condition at this moment, in a matter of infinitely more importance than all which this world can bestow upon them.— This night their souls *may* be required of them. Nay, more, they *will* inevitably be required of numbers, totally unprepared for that awful event : and they may find, when it is too late, that the depraved suggestions of their hearts have deceived their understandings, in a point upon which depends no less than their eternal salvation.

Let us, my brethren, adopt a wiser and a safer course. Let us live according to Christ-

ian precepts, and we shall not easily be brought to waver in our Christian faith. Let us always remember, that it rests upon the strongest grounds of moral probability : such as those upon which we constantly act in the most important affairs of our lives. If we attempt to carry it farther, it may lead us into enthusiasm ; which, by a not unnatural process, may finally settle in doubt or unbelief. If we suppose it to fall short of this, we do it injustice : and have not examined its evidences with sufficient care and impartiality. But let us by no means suffer our feelings to be uninterested in the question.—Whether their proper discipline shall serve to confirm our faith, or whether *that* shall guide *them* in the paths of righteousness, is immaterial ; provided those two great objects are adequately secured. For upon *them* will certainly depend our real happiness *here*, and upon *them* will still *more certainly* depend our irrevocable destiny *hereafter*.

## SERMON XVII.

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1 THESSALONIANS v. 17, 18.

*Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you.*

IN these words the Apostle lays down the whole of our duty to God, as it regards the worship we should pay to him ; and accordingly it will be found, not only that our public services consist of little else than prayer and thanksgiving to him, but that they are the only modes in which we can address ourselves to him with propriety, or with any probability of benefit to ourselves. So simple, yet so sublime, is the relation in which the creature stands to the Creator, with such humility does it become weak and helpless mortals to approach the throne of the Eternal, Almighty, Invisible God ! I propose therefore, in the following discourse, to consider the

nature of these two great Christian duties, and the influence which the right performance of them will naturally have upon our conduct in this world, and upon our Salvation in the next.

When the Apostle enjoins us to *pray without ceasing*—it is obvious that the precept was never intended to be taken in a strictly literal sense. In the strong language of Scripture, things are frequently expressed universally, which can only be understood generally. And nothing is so easy as to fall into error from not attending to this particular, and nothing shews more clearly the necessity for the exercise of reason and discrimination, in discovering the *spirit* of Scripture, when it is at all at variance with its *letter*.

So little did our Saviour require prayer to be without intermission, or even needlessly frequent; that his language always implies the reverse of this. In giving his disciples that admirable form of words, which might almost supersede the necessity for any other mode of intercession with the Almighty—so emphatic is it in its brevity, and so comprehensive in its signification—he introduced it in this manner—“*when ye pray, say*”—de-



noting that that duty was to be performed at intervals. And he strongly censures every thing like ostentation either in the mode, the length, or the frequency of our prayers. *When thou prayest* (he says) *thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men—but when ye pray use not vain repetitions as the heathens do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.* Upon which passage I would observe incidentally, that I consider it not only highly important to us as *doctrine*, but also as *evidence*. For it is certain that if Jesus were not what we believe him to be, he must have been a religious enthusiast. But can any thing be more free from any taint of enthusiasm, than the whole of his Sermon on the Mount, and particularly this part of it? Where do we find enthusiasm delivering doctrines so perfectly sober and rational as these are; so well adapted to the nature and exigencies of man, so entirely worthy of the being and attributes of God?

Prayer and Thanksgiving are sometimes considered only as parts of the same duty, but

there is this material difference between them. To the former we are impelled by our necessities, to the latter we are excited by gratitude. The one partakes much therefore of the nature of fear, the other much more of that of joy; the former respects mainly ourselves, and the latter has regard almost exclusively to God. They have, however, many qualities in common. They may be both either mental or vocal. That is, they may be the silent subjects of our thoughts, or they may be audibly expressed in language. Provided they are sincere and properly conceived, they will equally reach the ears of him to whom *all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid*. Indeed, the deeper is our feeling of the reverential awe due to the Divine Majesty, the more shall we be at a loss for terms adequately to express our sensations, and the more shall we be disposed to adopt the precept of the preacher: *God is in heaven, thou on earth, therefore let thy words be few*.

Both prayer and thanksgiving may be also either public or private; but they will generally if not always be connected. He who systematically, except from necessity, neglects

either of them, will not often be found to observe the other. Public prayer has its own and peculiar advantages. In all Churches, probably, it is performed at stated periods, which gives it the force and regularity of habit, and prevents its falling into that neglect, which uncertainty in point of time might produce. But in all Churches it is not, as it is in ours, regulated by fixed forms. This preference we conceive to be established upon the soundest principles. In the first place it is founded upon the example of our Saviour himself, and is but an extension of the injunction he has left us, to use that admirable form of prayer to which I have alluded. In the next place, congregations being necessarily composed of every variety of persons and conditions, and all having their peculiar distresses and necessities, it requires the utmost caution and deliberation, so to frame our petitions, and to return our thanks to the Almighty, as to embrace the circumstances of the greatest possible number of persons, of whom any congregation may be supposed to consist. And considering the ineffable majesty and dignity of him to whom our public addresses are offered, too much care cannot

possibly be employed in selecting such expressions as may most suitably convey our sentiments to that most awful and Divine Being. Both these objects it has been attempted to accomplish (and we think with great success) in that excellent Liturgy, which has so long been in use in our Church, and which has frequently been highly commended, even by those who have not adopted it. To meet the case of almost every individual, some of its forms are conceived in the most general terms, and some in the most particular. Of the former, the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men in the evening service, may be adduced as an instance; as may also that beautiful prayer of St. Chrysostom, which we repeat both in the morning and the evening, wherein, with the most perfect propriety, we implore God to fulfil our petitions, not so much according to our views of what is good for us, as according to what he shall judge to be *most expedient for us*. Of the latter, our admirable Litany is an eminent example, in which hardly any thing is omitted, which under any circumstances whatever, it can be fit for us to ask, or desirable to receive. And the whole is drawn up in a style of sober

piety and Scriptural eloquence, well adapted (so far as that can be said of any human compositions) to the supplications of a creature, addressed to the eternal and omnipotent Creator: and avoiding those tautologies, incoherencies, and other improprieties, which are but too apt to find their way into extemporaneous effusions, either from the pulpit or the desk. In addition to these advantages of public prayer, may be mentioned its utility, and indeed its necessity, for that numerous class of persons whose minds are too little instructed to enable them even to pray as they ought to do. And for all classes it is desirable that they should frequently be reminded, by promiscuously assembling together in the house of God, for the purposes of prayer and thanksgiving, of the common relation in which they all stand to him, as the universal parent of mankind, their present protector, and their final judge.

These are some of the great ends of public prayer. But private prayer has also its peculiar motives and benefits. And first for all those, who from a variety of causes, may be prevented frequently or altogether from attending the services of the Church. Great

age, sickness, distance, and other circumstances, may reduce them to the necessity of being absent, when they would willingly be present at them. In all such cases it is a great consolation to know, that prayer, whether addressed from the poorest cottage or the most splendid temple, from a numerous congregation or a single individual, will equally reach the throne of grace: and if preferred in a proper spirit, will equally be accepted by him, who regards neither the persons nor habitations of men, but looks down from the heaven of heavens with an impartial eye upon all the inhabitants of the earth.

But even for those who are in the habit of attending the public worship of God—notwithstanding the comprehensiveness and particularity of our Liturgy—such is the endless diversity of human affliction, that recourse must frequently be had to the medium of private prayer, to meet the exigencies of sudden or permanent calamity. Under the pressure of such visitations, the soul turns almost instinctively to God, either at regular periods and in the prescribed forms, or at occasional moments in its own natural eloquence, to beseech his powerful succour, the only aid upon

which it can rely in such an emergency. Nor does it ever in such a case rely in vain. Because, although the burden is not always removed, nor even materially lightened, strength to bear it is almost inevitably granted. The very act of prayer, when it springs from the heart, and engrosses the thoughts, elevates and fortifies the mind. And in this view private prayer has an evident advantage over that which is offered in public. The latter is performed from habitual custom, and therefore sometimes without sufficient attention, and concentration of our faculties upon the business in which we are engaged. It is liable also to various interruptions and distractions from its very nature. *That* private prayer also which is regular and periodical, *may* degenerate into a mere unmeaning formality. But that which is occasional, and as it were involuntary, prompted by the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, which bursts irresistibly from the heart, and carries the whole mind with it, is of a very different character. I imagine that there are few persons, particularly of those who are somewhat advanced in life, who do not frequently find themselves in this condition. Afflictions of the severest

kind are so numerous, that few indeed can escape their visitation. But it rarely happens perhaps that they are unattended with this advantage. That they make those better who have to endure them. They improve religion in the soul, where it already exists; and sometimes introduce it where it does not. They are the mode in which it makes its last appeal to the heart of the careless, the sceptic, or the infidel. And it is to be hoped that in this manner it does not often appeal in vain. How indeed *can* it fail of its intended effect? When we are bowed down with a weight of calamity, either in our own persons or in that of those who are dearer to us than ourselves, and feel (as may continually happen) that there is no human aid upon which we can rely with any confidence for our relief, to whom can we turn but to God for assistance? When despair surrounds us on every other side, to him alone can we look with hope, because we feel assured that there is no extremity in which he is not able to deliver us, and that there is none in which we are not authorized and encouraged to present ourselves before him, in the attitude of prayer and supplication. Hence we do so present



ourselves, not coldly, formally, or inattentively, but in deep sincerity, with minds exclusively occupied with the overpowering matter in which we are engaged, and feeling as if we stood in the very presence of God himself. Nor though it should happen (as it will sometimes or even frequently) that our petitions are not attended with success, can they in any case be said to be quite unavailing. It is a great comfort to feel that we have neglected nothing in our power to remove the evil under which we are suffering. To be convinced that it is the will of God that we should endure it for good purposes, however inscrutable by us, must be always sufficient to enable us to bear it, however painful it may be with pious fortitude and Christian resignation.

But though we naturally turn to God in prayer in our distresses, with earnestness and sincerity, proportioned to their intensity—yet I am afraid that it seldom happens that we are equally earnest and sincere in returning him thanks for the blessings which he bestows on us. Prosperity is undoubtedly less favourable to the growth of religion in the heart, than adversity. And this accords entirely

with the representations of Scripture, from the account of the fall of our first parents in paradise in the Old Testament, to the history of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in the New. The tendency of the *former* to make us forget God, and to be disobedient to his commandments; and of the *latter*, to recall him to our minds, and to endeavour to serve and please him, is matter of daily and hourly observation.

It has often been asked, and frequently in a spirit of pious enquiry, why is there so much evil of all kinds in the world? And is not God from whom every thing else proceeds, the author also of this evil—especially, since he *could* undoubtedly remove it, if he should think fit so to do? But does not a satisfactory answer arise to this question from what has just been said? If we believe that *God is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him*, does it not follow that religion, or the worship of him *in spirit and in truth*, is by far the most important business of our lives? But if it appears that the greatest evils with which we have to contend, are those which have the greatest tendency to make us religious, that is, to awaken in us a real sense of

our dependance upon God, and to produce in us a firm resolution to live according to his rules, and to confer on us the ability to carry that resolution into effect, is not the *end and design* of those *very evils* demonstrated to be beneficial to us? Are they not the salutary medicines of the soul, however unpleasant to the taste, and repugnant as it were to our nature—the sharp and painful remedies, by which *alone* its life can be preserved?

Should this prove to be the happy result of our afflictions, contradictory as it may seem to be, it is nevertheless true, that we ought to return God thanks for the infliction of those very evils, from which we have prayed to be delivered. But so far is this from being our habit, that I fear there is no duty, in which we are apt to be more remiss, than this of thanksgiving to God, even for benefits received, or for evils removed. In our distresses we are sufficiently prone to prayer; but in our joys we are too frequently forgetful of him, to whom we are indebted for them. Yet how different is our conduct towards each other! We always solicit favours with reluctance and hesitation, but our gratitude is commonly prompt and exuberant. The

reason of this difference seems to be this. Men receive petitions of whatever nature with almost universal unwillingness. They can seldom grant them without some diminution of that which they would wish to retain, or to employ in a different manner. Feeling this to be true as it regards ourselves, we naturally return those acknowledgments to others for their good offices, which were the case reversed we should expect to receive. But we are perfectly conscious that this does in no degree apply to God. We perceive in him nothing but a boundless power to grant, which however profusely employed, is never decreased. We feel that to such a being our utmost tribute of thanksgiving must be poor and worthless—and this, as it is the most charitable, so I hope it is also the truest cause of our neglect in this respect. But that it is a very insufficient cause is most certain. Knowing that we have nothing but gratitude to offer to God for all his mercies, can never be a reason for withholding from him all we have to give. But there is perhaps another way of accounting for our lamentable deficiency in this duty. When upon our earnest prayers, some signal blessing is vouchsafed to us—such as the

restoration of our health when it has been seriously impaired, or that of others equally dear to us—it is to be hoped that we are not often so wicked, as to be entirely insensible to such a mark of the Divine goodness, or to receive it with thankless indifference. But it is for those daily and hourly benefits which are accorded to us almost without solicitation, that we are wont to be peculiarly ungrateful. These flow upon us so constantly and in such abundance, that we are hardly conscious of their existence, but by their loss. Yet they are at the same time so essential to us, and of such inestimable value in themselves, that they ought to produce in us the deepest sense of our obligation to their Divine Author.— Life, health, and daily food, are surely blessings, for which we never can be sufficiently grateful to Almighty God, from whom they indisputably proceed; and by whom they can undoubtedly be in a moment withdrawn.— Yet it is no very uncommon thing to hear persons, particularly under circumstances of depression of various kinds, speak lightly of the value of *life itself*. But can any thing be more irrational than thus to estimate the first and best gift of the Creator, that upon

which all others, both temporal and eternal, depend? Or to put in competition the vain additions which we or our fellow-mortals can make to it, with the great work of the Deity himself? But it is when we consider our existence *here* as but a preparation for another and an endless one *hereafter*, that our astonishment is excited, that any persons can be found to undervalue its importance, or to think any evils with which it may be attended, a reason for regarding it with indifference or contempt.

To evils many and serious, it is undoubtedly exposed. And from these we are taught by our Lord himself daily to pray to be delivered. And from these we are for the most part delivered. This part of our prayers (and a most material one it is) is at least very generally granted. How few of us are there who must not confess, that scarcely a day passes in which we are not protected from many grievous calamities to which our nature is liable, from which no prudence or efforts of our own could possibly save us, and for which therefore we are manifestly indebted *solely* to the Providence of God! Yet are we always or *often* mindful of these things? Do we

regularly and suitably pour forth our thanks to him for such signal mercies? Are we constantly anxious to please and propitiate a Being, whose boundless power to do us good or harm, we can neither doubt nor deny? Do we ask then, how is this to be accomplished? The answer must be found in our hearts and our consciences, in our reason, and in the Scriptures. These one and all concur to assure us, that to fear and love God, and to keep his commandments, is the whole of our duty, and the only title we have to his favour and protection.

Let no one imagine, that this simple definition of religion is any derogation from the dignity of its sublime mysteries! It pre-supposes faith in the being and attributes of God, as the foundation of our love and fear of him.— And it implies also a firm belief in the truth of the Revelation which he has afforded us, from which alone we can ascertain what he wills us to do. Hence it appears that thanksgiving is not so barren a duty as some may conceive it to be. For though it is true that we *can* do nothing, by which God himself can be benefited: yet we can do *much* that shall be agreeable to his will, and the neglect

of which cannot but excite his displeasure, and bring down punishment upon us, either in this world, or in that which is to come.

It has been remarked by a very judicious writer of our Church, that God must have intended the happiness of his creatures, or their misery, or been indifferent about either<sup>1</sup>.— That he did not intend their misery is certain, because if he had he could easily have accomplished it. The pains both of body and mind which most of us occasionally suffer, might have been made perpetual and universal. Thus life itself would have been a continual torment, which every one would have been anxious to shake off. But that the fact is in general the reverse of this we all know. And therefore it is clear that God did not create us to be miserable. And to suppose him to be altogether indifferent about us, is inconsistent with almost every attribute which we ascribe to him. It can neither be reconciled with his wisdom, his goodness, nor his justice. We must entirely reject therefore that supposition as absurd. Still we must hesitate,

<sup>1</sup> Paley's Moral Philosophy, vol. i. c. 5; and Natural Theology, p. 366.



before we can positively conclude that he designed us for happiness. Because he could *as certainly* have insured *that* object, as our misery, if such had been his pleasure. But that *that* is not our condition is evident. Our lot is in general composed of good and evil: in which though the former preponderates, the latter abounds to a degree which would forbid us to say, that God intended our happiness, were all that evil *inevitable and of his infliction*. But the truth is, that by far the greater portion of it is not attributable to him, but to ourselves. And we may therefore say with confidence, that he designed our happiness—such happiness at least as our present nature admits—but that we ourselves should in a great degree be mutually instrumental to its production. And hence it is, that the religion of the Gospel consists so much of rules, by the observance of which the general happiness of mankind would be promoted, to an extent of which the world *as yet* has had no experience. But though the operation of these rules hitherto has been slow, partial, and unequal to our natural expectations, and even frequently counteracted and perverted, still every thing indicates that they will ultimately

triumph and become universal. And as there seems something in the present circumstances, not only of this country but of the Christian community in general, that peculiarly calls for their observance, so I trust that by the Providence of God, they will be made conducive to that most desirable end. That the evils which result to society from pride, luxury, avarice, and self-interest, will be abated. And that the benefits which flow from justice, temperance, benevolence, and charity, will be augmented. So that we *may* look forward to a time when our thanksgivings to Almighty God for temporal blessings, produced by a more perfect obedience to his commandments, will be greatly multiplied—and the happiness of this world be proportionably encreased—whilst our prayers will ascend to him chiefly for those spiritual gifts which emanate immediately from himself, concern the welfare of our souls, and secure for us the felicity of the world to come.

## SERMON XVIII.

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TITUS ii. 11, 12.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*

“WERE it required (says Bishop Horne) to produce from the Scriptures, that passage which exhibits in the fewest words, the fullest account of the nature and design of Christianity—this (and what follows) is perhaps the passage that should be fixed on for the purpose<sup>1</sup>.” But I have limited my text to the words which I have just repeated, because they contain the whole matter to which I propose now to draw your attention. The Apostle upon this, as upon other occasions, strongly insists upon practical morality as

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in D'Oyly and Mant's Bible.

being one of the great ends of the Christian dispensation. But in doing this he makes use of an expression which may easily be misunderstood, which has in fact led to great errors—and which admits (as it seems to me) but of one explanation, which can reconcile it to reason and to common sense, and prevent it from being a discouragement to that virtue which it is certainly designed to recommend and enforce. He tells us that *the grace of God that bringeth salvation*, that is, the Gospel Revelation—*teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.* The phrase which I think here calls for much consideration, in order to determine what it is really intended to convey, is that which seems to require us to renounce all worldly desires and pursuits, (or, at least, in a great degree to renounce them,) as inconsistent with the religion which we profess, and adverse to the hopes of future happiness, which it holds out to us. Were it the only expression of the kind in the New Testament, it might safely be passed over without a very minute examination. But the fact is quite otherwise. Language very similar in effect

pervades all the Gospels and the Epistles, and therefore it becomes absolutely necessary to ascertain, what sense we should put upon it, that we may avoid the error of carrying it too far on the one hand, or not far enough on the other.

There is no greater hindrance to human virtue, than the giving an exaggerated or impracticable idea of its nature and extent. Did the Gospel prescribe for us a course of conduct, manifestly incompatible with our existence in the world, or even subversive of our happiness in it, it would afford an argument against its truth, not easily to be answered. They who are already dissatisfied with it, on account of the restraint which it imposes upon their disorderly passions, and vicious propensities, would triumphantly reject it, if they could justly charge it with denying them the use of those harmless pleasures and gratifications which the bounty of Providence has evidently designed them to enjoy. But to this danger the Gospel has been at all times exposed by those who have pressed its doctrines upon this point too far. Both before the Reformation and since, error has been frequently and extensively inculcated, by inter-

preting our Saviour's observations too literally on this head, or by not distinguishing between *our* circumstances and those of his immediate disciples. To some of *them*, no doubt, his precepts might be applied in their strict and literal sense. But to the generality of his hearers, as to ourselves, they must have been addressed in their spirit and not in their letter. To those who followed him constantly, and lived under his personal protection, and to whom he imparted miraculous powers, for the propagation of the Gospel, any attention to worldly concerns was absolutely needless. They were taken wholly out of the ordinary classes of human society. They might safely *leave all* to follow their Divine Master, even though that Master himself had not *where to lay his head*.

It is very observable that almost all our Lord's instructions for the conduct of life were delivered in extreme terms; with which it is obvious that mankind in general never *have* complied, and never *can be expected* to comply, until a state of things shall arise very different from what has been hitherto known. The reason for this was doubtless to bring about gradually that great alteration and improvement in

human affairs, in which they would no longer be impracticable, and which they have a direct tendency to produce. But until this period shall arrive, we must be content to look upon many of them as rules placed far beyond our reach, which we must endeavour constantly to approach, without expecting to be able to attain. It will be necessary to give a few instances of his mode of teaching, in order to illustrate my meaning, and to shew its propriety. When he charged those who heard his Sermon on the Mount, to *take no thought for the morrow*; it is evident that the injunction could only be strictly obeyed by those who lived under his immediate protection—to others an attempt to observe it could only have led them into grievous errors, and involved them in the deepest distress. In like manner, his doctrine of forgiving enemies, though it can hardly in practice be carried too far by individuals, was nevertheless illustrated in a manner which it has never been thought by any sober-minded man, was intended to be literally adopted. *Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also—and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have*

*thy cloak also.* These precepts were undoubtedly designed to inculcate a mild and placable disposition ; but by no means to encourage submission to personal violence, and much less to invite its repetition : or to justify the invasion of another's property, under the cover of a groundless legal proceeding. They and the rest of them were calculated to repress as much as possible all the evil propensities of the human heart, and to substitute for them kind affections and virtuous principles. Hence they were naturally and properly terminated by that striking exhortation, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.* That is, advance yourselves as far as possible in holiness—imitate to the utmost the example I shall set you—and obey my commandments in their greatest practicable extent. This is the only sense we can affix to the injunction of being perfect. The highest human virtue must still fall infinitely short of the Divine perfection. Upon another occasion our Saviour uses the same phrase, but in the same modified sense. To the young man who enquired *what good thing he should do to have eternal life?* and who professed that he had kept the com-



mandments, he said—*if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* Here it is evident that he did not enjoin this extreme act of disinterestedness and benevolence, without the qualification, that in the event of its performance, the young man should become one of his immediate disciples. Nevertheless, he hesitated, *for he had great possessions:* which occasioned our Saviour to remark upon the difficulty which the rich would find in entering into the kingdom of heaven: at which even his disciples were so much amazed, that they exclaimed—*who then can be saved?*—They were unable to conceive, that human virtue could be carried to the extent which this injunction demanded.

It was natural that the Deity, when he thought fit to send his Son into the world to instruct mankind in the principles of true religion, should give them perfect rules of conduct, which *his Son only* could exemplify in his own person. And although it was not to be expected that the weakness of our nature could exactly follow such rules, or imitate so bright a pattern of excellence, yet they con-

tributed materially *to this great end*, the foundation of Christianity itself. This could not be effected without that total change in the minds of all who embraced it, whether Jews or Gentiles, which was called repentance, or a complete alteration for the better in faith, in sentiments, and conduct. This, which could not be expected at once from the generality of mankind, was nevertheless attempted, and in some degree accomplished, by many eminent individuals, who *left all for the sake of our Saviour and the Gospel*. And after he had quitted the world, this principle was continued and acted upon by St. Paul and the other Apostles, and many illustrious martyrs to the truth in the first ages of the Church. Insomuch that it was laid down as a maxim by St. Paul and Barnabas in their preaching, that their converts must, *through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God*: that is, that they could not *then* become Christians without enduring hardships of various kinds—in suffering privations to which they were unaccustomed, in relinquishing vices to which they were much addicted, in practising virtues which cost them great sacrifices—above all, in undergoing the severest

persecutions, and even death itself, rather than abandon the religion which they had adopted. That all this greatly contributed to its establishment is certain. That it was even essentially necessary to its propagation, by those human means which the Almighty in his wisdom appointed for that purpose, is extremely probable. But with its final triumph in the world, a great alteration took place in this respect. The change in manners, habits, and principles, which suddenly was effected amongst the first converts to Christianity, was in its nature and extent unexampled in the history of mankind. *If any man be in Christ,* (said St. Paul to the Corinthians,) *he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new:* that is, (say the Commentators) “his former affection to the things of this world, and his former designs to promote his worldly interests, are ceased. He is become a new or quite different man in these respects, setting his affection on things above, and pursuing his spiritual advantage.”

Certain it is, that much of that *tribulation*, through which the first Christians were obliged to enter the kingdom of God, no longer

exists. Many of the vices which to *them* it was painful to abandon, are now objects of nothing but disgust and abhorrence. Many of the virtues which they acquired with difficulty, are now practised habitually, and are become as it were parts of our nature. So that it is no longer necessary to call upon men for very arduous exertions of virtue, and much less to inculcate undue and erroneous ideas of it. It is sufficient *now*, and has long been so, to require the observance of the precepts of the Gospel in that temperate and practicable sense, which an attention to the actual state of human affairs, and the imperative exigencies of the world around us, absolutely demand. And happy would it be for mankind, if in this, their sound and rational meaning, they were observed as much as they ought to be, and might easily be. But so far has an exaggerated statement of them, founded upon too literal an adherence to the terms in which they are expressed, any tendency to promote their observance, that it has been the cause in former times of great abuses of Christian doctrines, and of many superstitious practices, not yet by any means abandoned. And it has at present the ill effect of indis-

posing some men to practise within reasonable limits, those duties, which when urged beyond those limits, they perceive to be absurd, and contradictory to God's Providence, as deduced from the constitution of human affairs.

In proof of the former of these points, we may refer to the abuses of Christianity, which formerly prevailed to so great an extent in the Romish Church, and which though *now* much mitigated in some countries where that form of religion is professed, still continue in others unaltered by time or reason, and in none probably are wholly suppressed. I allude to those unwise and unnatural monastic institutions, which once flourished to so frightful an extent in the Catholic kingdoms of Europe. To what but an erroneous idea that the religion of the Gospel demanded, or at least would be promoted by, the total seclusion of great numbers of its professors from the world, could those grievous follies owe their origin? Upon what but a perversion of the reasonings of St. Paul upon that subject, could vows of celibacy have been introduced and justified? What but a groundless notion, that there was a sort of merit in enduring pain and affliction

for the sake of Christ, could have given occasion to those severe penances, fastings, and rigid mortifications, which we cannot read of without astonishment and contempt? And what is still worse than even all this, it can hardly be doubted that they who in many instances imposed these practices upon others, and submitted, or appeared to submit to them themselves, did not really believe that religion required them, but invented them as instruments of tyrannizing over the consciences of their fellow-creatures; and of covering their own wickedness with a mantle of seeming austerity and of pretended virtue.

And with respect to the ill effect to be apprehended at present in our Church from urging too far the doctrine of renouncing the world, and its pomps and vanities; I would but observe, that it not only cannot be justified by a sound and rational exposition of Scripture, but that it would inevitably cast suspicion upon the sincerity of those who advanced it. For who is so ignorant as not to know, that the most sacred duty of every man to himself, to his family, and to society, absolutely requires his best exertions to promote his worldly interest; though always in subser-

vience to the dictates of conscience, the obligations of honesty, and the rules of temperance and moderation? In no other way can the means be obtained of supporting our existence, of improving the faculties which God has given us, and of obeying some of the most important of his commandments. In no other way can we so well promote the welfare of the community; which is best advanced by every man's labouring in his station for his individual benefit, subject to the restrictions just laid down. For nothing can be more evident, than that the attainment and the enjoyment of much of this world's good, by some classes of mankind, is not only perfectly consistent with, but absolutely necessary to the welfare of others less elevated, but not necessarily on that account less happy than they are. The same God, who in his word has commanded us to *let our moderation be known unto all men*, has also in his works given us abundantly of every thing which can contribute to our comfort and happiness, and which never fails, and never *can* fail, of fulfilling the gracious intentions of its Almighty Author, but by being perverted by the errors or vices of his creatures.

This great truth, which is equally apparent upon the face of Scripture and of nature, is, I think, too much overlooked at the present moment, as it probably has been at all times. But it was reserved for a writer of the present day, and who, it is to be feared, has but too many followers, encouraging as his doctrines do, that propensity of mankind which requires most to be restrained—I mean their selfishness—to deny that it is a truth altogether.—In opposition both to the law of Scripture and of nature, which command us to *be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it*—he would impose such checks upon the increase of the species, as would almost amount to a prohibition of the command itself. In manifest contradiction to the intentions of the Almighty, who gave the fruits of the earth for food *to all* his creatures, he maintains in effect, if not in terms, that even when there is enough for all, there may be numbers, who, without any fault of theirs, “have no right whatever to the smallest portion of it.” He tells them plainly, that “at Nature’s mighty feast, there is no vacant cover for them<sup>1</sup> ;”—that, “in fact, they have no

<sup>1</sup> See the note at the end of the Sermon.



business to be there." And he seems to more than doubt the *policy* of that humanity, which might induce the rich to bestow upon the poor, *the crumbs which fall from their tables* ; lest their numbers should encrease beyond the possibility of supplying their necessities.

It is true, that when it becomes physically impossible for any country, either to raise or to procure food enough for all its inhabitants, emigration is their only remaining resource : and it becomes then the clear duty of such a society to afford every facility to those who are thus compelled to avail themselves of it. But are *we* at present in this condition ? On the contrary, does not every thing indicate that we are still very far short of it ? Are there amongst us to be found any signs of any real deficiency of any thing requisite for the support or the comfort of human existence ? Is it not rather astonishing, is it not impious, that we should be actually complaining that we have a *superabundance* of every thing ? And is it not still more astonishing, that this superabundance should co-exist with very extensive distress, misery, and want ? That in the same breath we should be told that the necessaries of life are too cheap ;

and yet, that cheap as they are, they cannot be obtained in sufficient quantity, by great numbers of the people.

In what does *wealth* consist but in the *labour* of man? Can a single thing be mentioned conducive to his existence or comfort, which is not produced or rendered serviceable by it? And yet we are told that many amongst us are *standing idle, because no man hath hired them*. We have a superabundance it seems of *labour*, as well as of every thing else that is valuable; and an excess of wealth is the very parent of our poverty. It appears to me that the cause of all this must be sought either in the nature of things, or in the institutions of man. To say that it is in the nature of things, is, in other words, to ascribe it to God himself, which it is equally wicked and false to do. The fault then must be in the systems of man. And I think that it lies precisely in this: that we sacrifice *the end to the means*. The end of human society is the well-being of all those of whom it consists.—The means are the pursuit by every one of his individual interest. But the latter is not only preferred to the former, but when it cannot be obtained, the former is virtually abandoned.

Hence it is treated as an indisputable truth; that when labour cannot be employed to the profit of *some* one besides the labourer, it cannot be employed at all. We are then said to have "a population not demanded by capital and employment." That is, that men have no right to existence, if their labour cannot be rendered profitable to others as well as to themselves. And as this will sometimes happen, or be supposed to happen, it follows that much labour is often unemployed, that is, much wealth is unproduced, and much misery is sustained in consequence of it.

Most just is the doctrine of St. Paul, *that if any would not work, neither should he eat*. But it is equally true, that in no well-organized state, and least of all in any Christian country, should there be found those, who, being both able and willing to work, cannot find any or sufficient employment; any mode by which they can render themselves mutually useful to each other. This is a case which probably the Apostle never contemplated, which does not seem to have occurred to his commentators, and which was reserved to force itself upon our attention most painfully in these times. For, we are told most con-

fidently, that a man “does not possess the right to subsistence, when his labour will not fairly purchase it.” That is, if he cannot find work and adequate wages, he should starve. It is admitted indeed, that our laws say the reverse of this, but it is contended, that in this respect, they “attempt to reverse the laws of nature, and that they fail in their object; and that the poor who are intended to be benefited by them, suffer most cruelly from this inhuman deceit, which is practised upon them.” In what manner the poor suffer by not being left literally to perish, the author does not explain: but his meaning probably is, that but for this impolitic provision for them, they would not have been brought into existence at all. But to what extent he would carry his principle of contracting population—what would be its probable effect upon society—or how far it is possible in the nature of things, to regulate the *supply* in this particular by the *demand*, does not appear.

Pauperism is undoubtedly, and has long been, the great evil of this country, and threatens the most serious consequences to the whole community. It is in vain either to deny it or to conceal it. And it is a matter

strictly within the province of the pulpit to notice and to discuss : because it is our paramount duty as Christians to diminish its effects as much as possible. The Gospel which was preached especially both *to* and *for* the poor, imposes this duty upon us in the most solemn manner. There are but three conceivable ways, in which the condition of the poor can be improved. First, by encreasing the wages of labour. Secondly, by charity, whether public and compulsory—or private and voluntary. Or lastly, by emigration.—The first of these appears to me to be the *best* on all accounts—principally, because it is the most *just*. The necessity for the *second*, arises chiefly from its deficiency. A great portion of the charity of this country is nothing but the wages of labour under another name, and in an odious and pernicious form. The third and last resource should be resorted to only in the case of necessity, when all other means have been tried and exhausted. It then falls in equally with the language of Scripture, and the dictates of reason, and harmonizes with the moral government of God, whether deduced from Revelation, or the physical constitution of things. This

subject, which will inevitably occupy more and more the public attention, and in which the welfare of every individual amongst us is deeply concerned, is hardly a digression from the preceding part of this discourse, and will be found to be connected with the conclusions which remain to be drawn from it.—

I have endeavoured to shew, that the doctrine of denying the world and its vanities, does not require of us total seclusion from it, and the practice of unmeaning austerities—that it permits us to pursue its business and its pleasures within reasonable bounds, and by honourable means—such as power, distinction, wealth, and all those things which wealth can purchase. What then, it will be said, does it really forbid—or in what does it actually consist? The answer to this question will be found in the latter part of the text, which instructs us that we are to *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. Living soberly, here signifies the forming “a habit of self-government, whereby we are able to restrain our appetites, passions, and affections, as often as their indulgence is in any respect sinful<sup>1</sup>.” This is a duty which we

<sup>1</sup> Macknight upon the Text.

owe more immediately to ourselves. It prevents us from running into that excess in things not unlawful in themselves, which is so common; and yet inevitably prejudicial to that happiness, which it is intended to promote. And this immoderate gratification of our own desires, almost always deprives us of the inclination, and the means of exercising that charity towards others, which the principles of our religion, no less than the interests of society, absolutely demand. And it further leads directly to the infringement of the next duty inculcated by the Apostle, which relates expressly to our neighbour. He who will not live *soberly*, will seldom live *righteously*.—Intemperance in our desires soon reconciles us to the pursuit of advantage by undue means. “And what is it but the prosecution of such desires (says a late excellent Prelate of our Church) that fills the world with wickedness and misery; producing luxury and extravagance amongst some; poverty and wretchedness among others; hateful quarrels and vexatious suits between individuals and families; ravaging and desolating wars between princes and kingdoms; factions and tumults in the state; and we may add, generally

heresies and divisions in the Church, as the Apostle has classed *them* likewise, in his Epistle to the Galatians, among the works of the flesh. What is here required of us then is, to consult our own happiness, and that of others: let the desires, that are contrary to the commands of the Gospel, be examined, and it will be found that they cannot be satisfied without hurting human society: and if we are commanded to *deny worldly lusts*, it is because they have deluged the earth with sin and sorrow<sup>1</sup>.”

And thus we are brought to consider the last duty mentioned by the Apostle, namely, that which we owe to God. If we do not live both *soberly and righteously*, we become sinful, and cease to live *godly*. For our duty to him requires us not only to believe in him, and his attributes—his providential government of the world—his Revelation—and his future judgment of all mankind—but also to obey his commandments as the means of obtaining his favour here, and securing our salvation hereafter.

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Horne, as quoted by D'Oyly and Mant.



But how impossible is it to reconcile this, with an entire and exclusive devotion to the world, and its allurements and interests ! How vain must be the attempt to *serve God and mammon !* *The carnal mind* (says the Apostle) *is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* Hence it is that Christianity calls for that Regeneration of our minds, which consists in the correction of all its faults, and the cultivation of all its virtues. And the world, and the parts we are severally appointed to perform in it, is the theatre on which this great work must, if at all, be accomplished. Let us not neglect then the opportunity, which it yet affords us, *of doing good unto all men,* that we may ourselves receive good hereafter, at the hand of our Almighty Judge. Let us *use this world, as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.* And seeing that it *shall be dissolved*—let us consider, *what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness.* And may the grace of God dispose us to purify our hearts from an inordinate attachment to the world, and fix them upon a

worthier and more exalted object: and thus may we be enabled *so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.*

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NOTE, page 351.—I quote this passage and some others from the Edition of 1803 of Mr. Malthus's "Essay on the Principle of Population," the only one which I had seen when I wrote the Sermon. I have since discovered that it is expunged from the fifth edition of 1817, as are some other passages which struck me as objectionable; particularly one at the end of the 11th chapter of the second book, upon the *remedial* operation of "Famine," which, although expressed with singular eloquence, grated harshly upon my ears. I have not suppressed my own observations, because I think they are still warranted by the general spirit of the work; the *tendency* of which appears to me to be very different from the *intentions* of its author, which I have no doubt were altogether humane and laudable. I have not the vanity or the presumption to discuss the merits of such a book in a note, which is the less necessary, as I am aware that it has still several able and regular opponents, whose works, however, have not at present fallen in my way. I will only, therefore, venture a remark or two upon those leading points, in which the author's views (if I understand them) appear to me to be quite indefensible.

His object is to ascertain, whether the condition of the lower classes of society has any prospect of improvement? And the only suggestion which I can find for this purpose, is one which pervades the whole work, but which

is plainly visionary, and on which he himself places no reliance, namely, that "they should not marry till they have a fair prospect of supporting a family." How this is to be accomplished, when the wages of *common labour*, either in agriculture or manufactures, will seldom support the labourer himself without the assistance of the poor-rate, it is impossible to comprehend. Were they all to wait for this happy period, it should seem that population would speedily be reduced to a level, low enough to satisfy the most cautious political economist. If a labourer is not in a condition to marry when he is at his full strength, according to the present circumstances of this country, he is never likely to be so. The lowest rate of wages *should then* be sufficient to enable him to marry, if he is so disposed: always remembering, that his wife is generally able to earn something herself—and that his children, during their infancy, are maintained at a very small expence, and are very soon capable of contributing to their own support. Those who are both able and willing to work, but cannot find employment, should be provided with it by *national establishments*, in which their remuneration should *at least* be adequate to *their own* maintenance, but always *under* that of those who gained their living by their own unassisted exertions. And none should be considered, or treated as *paupers*, but those who from infancy, old age, or other moral or physical incapacity, were unable to support themselves. This seems to have been the intention of the 43d of Elizabeth, which (says Mr. Justice Blackstone) was "a plan more humane and beneficial than even feeding and clothing of millions, by affording them the means (with proper industry) to feed and clothe themselves." And I fully agree with him, that "the farther any subsequent plans for

maintaining the poor have departed from this institution, the more impracticable, and even pernicious, their visionary attempts have proved<sup>1</sup>." The present system of eking out wages from the poor-rates, is a virtual admission that they are *too low*, and is an attempt to supply their deficiency in the worst possible way—and is also the fruitful parent of much of the misery amongst the poor, which we have so much reason to deplore.

Another notion which pervades Mr. M.'s work, is that of regulating the supply of population by the demand.—He is "confident that when society does not want a man's labour, he has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and in fact has no business to be where he is." And this must be on the supposition that there is food enough in the country to supply his necessity.—Because otherwise the proposition is nugatory. When there is not enough for all, some must inevitably *starve*, or approach to that condition. So that according to this doctrine—at the close of a long war, a country may fairly disband its soldiers and sailors, and if they cannot find employment of another sort, which with many of them is very likely to happen, they have no *claim of right* to support or even to *existence*. Or if a new manufactory collects its thousands about it, and suddenly the article manufactured goes out of fashion, or is supplied by the aid of machinery with comparatively little manual labour, the unhappy artisan may be doomed to perish, without any impeachment of the justice of the society of which he forms a part. How a Christian clergyman could permit

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<sup>1</sup> Commentaries, vol. iv. 432.

himself to give utterance to such a sentiment, I am quite at a loss to conceive ! Particularly as the work contains abundant proof that the author is really a man of *humanity*, as well as of *unquestionable ability*. His error, in my opinion, is the not uncommon one of being *too fond of his theory* : and in his admiration of its excellencies (*the far-famed ratios*) to lose sight of its defects, which to less partial eyes are very conspicuous.

When he is speaking of the *supply of population*, he considers the poor-laws as tending “to encourage an extent of it, which is not regulated by the demand for labour.” But when he is treating of the *supply of corn*, he discovers, that “it is impossible always to be secure of having *enough*, if we have not, in general, *too much*.” Why does he not apply the same principle to both cases ? from which it would follow, that there must be always a *redundant population*, “whose labour the society does not want,” but who *have*, nevertheless, a *claim of right* to be supported by the laws of God and nature, and (as he admits) *of this country also*—though he treats the “famous 43d of Elizabeth” with the most unmeasured contempt, as ordaining “an absolute impossibility”—and as being “as arrogant and absurd, as if it had enacted that two ears of wheat should in future grow where one only had grown before.”

With as little ceremony and politeness, he deals with the Abbé Raynal—whose assertion, that “*avant toutes les Loix sociales l’homme avoit le droit de subsister*”<sup>1</sup>—appears to me to be perfectly just : but which, at any rate,

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<sup>1</sup> Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes, vol. x. p. 217.

is not answered *at all* by the flippant observation, that “he might with just as much propriety have said, that before the institution of social laws, every man had a right to live a hundred years.” The Abbé’s meaning I take to be this, that man in a state of nature, having a clear right to food wherever he could find it, did not enter into society to make his condition *worse* in that respect than it was before; but on the contrary, to render that *certain*, which had been hitherto *precarious*. And that the *law of property*, to which he necessarily submitted, confers not an *absolute* but a *qualified right*—always implying that it exists for the benefit of the community in general, and not exclusively for those who possess it. That this is true, every tax which takes from any man any portion of his property, is a direct proof.—But what would be the consequence of an absolute right to property in one part of a community, and none whatever to subsistence under certain circumstances in another? Suppose there were a very fertile island, or a portion of a continent, the soil of which had been appropriated of course, like that of almost all countries, and a law of primogeniture established—and let us further suppose that it produced abundance of food with little labour, and from its fine climate and position it wanted few manufactures, and that it was as yet but thinly peopled in proportion to its produce, yet that it had many hands (which might easily happen) *whose labour the society did not want*. According to Mr. M.’s principle, these unfortunate people would have “*no right whatever to the smallest portion of food,*” however superabundant it might be: in fact, “they would have no business to be there”—“no cover for them at that mighty feast”—even compas-

sion to them would be *indiscreet*; better “humanely” inform them that “the table was already full.”

That the right of property is not an absolute but a qualified one, I take to be clear, not only from the manner in which society actually deals with it, but also from the measures which it would infallibly exercise towards it, in certain conceivable cases. I have lately seen some land, which I was credibly informed, the owner from caprice for several years had refused to cultivate himself, or to suffer any one else to cultivate. Whilst this remains a solitary or a very rare instance, the legislature perhaps would not think it worth while to interfere with it—but should so strange an example have but a few followers, who can doubt that a law would speedily be passed to prevent such an *abuse* of the right of property? Or, if it were known, that a few great capitalists were collecting a million or two of sovereigns, for the avowed purpose of throwing them into the sea, no matter from what motive, would not the government be highly culpable, if they did not exert “a vigour beyond the law,” to prevent such a waste of treasure, and trust to parliament for an indemnity? And yet in neither of these cases could they be justified, if the right of property is of an absolute, and not of a qualified nature. I am glad to find that I am not singular in my notions upon this subject. A writer in a late <sup>1</sup> number of the Quarterly Review, which is justly considered to express the sentiments of a very numerous and respectable body of readers, goes even farther than

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<sup>1</sup> No. 85. p. 276.

I have thought it necessary to do. He says, "We cannot allow that either the government or the legislature understand the nature of the duties they have undertaken, or even rightly view their interest as private individuals, if they are not aware that the condition of the labouring class—the great bulk of the people—ought to be the *first* and most *important* object of their solicitude. That this class is at present in a most depressed and degraded state, is proved by the reports of their own committees; and it is most certain, that in a country possessed of such vast wealth and resources, this can only be owing to the *faultiness of her institutions*, or the mismanagement of her rulers. *The right of property itself is subservient to the general welfare*; and that welfare is clearly not promoted by a distribution of property which confers princely wealth on a few, and condemns the industrious multitude, *by whom that wealth is fabricated*, to the alternative of hopeless toil or abject pauperism."

I will not extend my objections to Mr. M. as a *political reasoner* any farther, though I could easily do so. But I must be allowed to say, that if I cannot defer to him implicitly in that character, much less can I confide in him in another—I mean that of a *political prophet*. In this respect he must be content to share the fate, which has usually attended that unlucky fraternity. Witness these portentous declarations in the 9th chapter of his third book. "During the late scarcities, the price of labour has been continually rising—*not to fall again*; the rents of land have been every where advancing—*not to fall again*; and of course the price of produce *must rise—not to fall again*." This was written during the war. But as Mr. M. could not possibly have calculated upon the war's being perpetual, it follows, that he must *now* see



that it was an error of such a magnitude, as might almost have induced him, like Sir Walter Raleigh, to have thrown his book into the fire, rather than to prolong its existence by fresh editions.

In the conclusion of his work he makes an admission, which I should have thought might have led him to distrust some of its principles. He says, "from a review of the state of society in former periods, compared with the present, I should certainly say, that the evils resulting from the principle of population have rather diminished than increased, even under the disadvantage of an almost total ignorance of their real cause." More than two centuries have elapsed since the passing of the 43d of Elizabeth, and during all that time, according to Mr. M., "a population has been encouraged not regulated by the demand for labour"—and yet so far has it been from establishing that "constant tendency in all animated life, to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it;" (which is the foundation of *his* system, but which cannot, I think, be reconciled with that of *Him*, who "saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good): that we are at this hour in a condition the very reverse of this. So far from having a population redundant in proportion to food, we have food exuberant with respect to population; as the artificial means resorted to, to increase its price, sufficiently proves. And yet strange to say, multitudes who are labouring incessantly, cannot procure it in sufficient quantity for the proper support of their families; and numbers who are both able and willing to work, cannot procure it at all.

It seems to me to be as clear as the sun at noon-day, that the means at present exist in abundance in *these kingdoms*, for the comfortable support of all their inhabit-

ants, not only with regard to food, but also all the other necessities of *civilized* life, such as clothing, lodging, &c. And yet, I am afraid, that a large portion of the community are nearly destitute of all these things: and are enduring hardships and privations scarcely incident to the savage state. If this be so, it is a state of things not more injurious to those who suffer it, than dangerous to those who do not attempt to alter it. What is wanting, is a more equitable principle of distribution—in other words, better wages to the lower classes of labourers both in husbandry and manufactures—and *useful employment* for *all* who are able to work, but who, under the present system, cannot find it for themselves. Be it that this demands capital—a large capital if you please. A country that could spend almost *one hundred millions* in a *single year* of war, could raise it without difficulty, be its amount what it may. And I believe, moreover, that it would speedily repay itself in a reduction of the poor's-rate, and in the increased produce of the taxes upon consumable commodities.

Under such a system, that population would advance is extremely probable. But still the evil consequences, which Mr. M. apprehends, would not follow. We might indeed approach that point, which he agrees with me is the natural limit to population, namely,—that, when the country would need all the food which it could either produce or acquire. And I admit, that it would be desirable to anticipate that period by timely emigration. But it should seem that we are still at a great distance from the necessity for such a resource.

After having differed so much with Mr. M., I am happy to be able to produce two passages, in which I entirely concur with him: and from which, if he had set

out, I think he would have arrived at a more consolatory conclusion than he has done, when he says that, "a more general prevalence of prudential habits, with respect to marriage amongst the poor, is the *only* source from which any permanent and general improvement in their condition can arise." The passages to which I allude are these—"The wealth and power of nations are, after all, only desirable as they contribute to happiness." "Other circumstances being the same, it may be affirmed, that countries are populous according to the quantity of human food which they produce or *can* acquire: and *happy*, according to the liberality with which this food is divided, or the quantity which a day's labour will purchase."—  
O! si sic omnia!

## SERMON XIX.

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1 CORINTHIANS x. 31.

*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do,  
do all to the glory of God.*

THESE words are the conclusion of certain instructions which the Apostle gave to his Corinthian converts, who, it should seem, had consulted him upon these points. Whether they might innocently go with their heathen friends into an idol's temple, and partake of the feasts which were eaten there in honour of the idol? Whether they might buy and eat meats, sold in the markets, which had been sacrificed to idols? And whether, when invited to the houses of the heathen, they might eat of such meats, if they were set before them as a common meal? Nothing can be more natural than that such questions should have been put, under the circumstances of that early stage of Christianity. They are per-

fectly consistent with the supposition of the genuineness and authenticity of the history of its establishment : but it is scarcely conceivable that they should have been inserted in a fictitious account of its origin. As a matter of *evidence*, therefore, they are not undeserving of our attention.

But it is the *doctrine* to be deduced from them, which I propose now to bring under your consideration. The scope of the Apostle's answer, is to prohibit his converts from any participation in idolatry, but to impose no other restriction upon their social intercourse with their brethren. But he does not lose the opportunity of mixing with his solution of their difficulties, some important instruction in their new religion. He contrasts the heathen feasts upon their sacrifices, with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which *he* had introduced amongst them. And shews that as they could not partake of the latter without the utmost benefit : so neither could they join in the former without the grossest contamination. *The cup of blessing* (he says) *which we bless, is it not the Communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the body*

*of Christ? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and of the table of devils.—* But he draws the line judiciously between sinful practices and innocent compliances: and permits them to continue to associate with their unconverted brethren; and to observe any customs which were not absolutely contrary to the Divine religion which they had adopted. Thus he adds—*If any of them which believe not, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you eat, asking no question, for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not, for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake.* But what he chiefly impresses upon them as the result of the matter, is the doctrine of the text. That *the glory of God* should be the ruling principle of their conduct. And whilst in some things, as in the solemn rites of their religion, *this* should be their direct and avowed object, in *all others*, even

the most indifferent, it should be kept constantly in view.

But this doctrine of *doing all things to the glory of God*, requires great discretion in its application. For the history of Christianity unhappily proves, that it has been but too frequently abused. Sometimes to justify the most abominable cruelties of superstition : and at others to countenance the most absurd follies of fanaticism. The true principles of the Gospel (it can never be too often asserted) lie between the extremes of irreligion and enthusiasm. If the latter (where it is sincere) may be more *venial* than the former in the sight of God ; it is hardly less *prejudicial* to the welfare of man. Supposing them to be errors of *equal* malignity, the one is of a more epidemic character than the other. The professors of atheism are but few, in comparison with the followers of Methodism. If impiety has slain its thousands, superstition has destroyed its ten thousands. When, therefore, we are taught to *do all to the glory of God*, we should remember, that it is rational religion, and sober piety, which are meant to be inculcated, and not the extravagancies of either ancient or modern mysticism.

It is no part of genuine Christianity, to set up any doctrines that are at variance with the actual constitution of things, and with the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed. The will of God is to be collected, as well from what he has *created* as from what he has *revealed*. *Man*, with his infirmities and his necessities, his reason, and his passions, his good and his evil propensities, is no less his *work*; than the *Gospel*, with its precepts and its mysteries, its hopes and its terrors, is his *word*. “It is not our business (says a late most able writer of our Church) to carry our opinions farther than Scripture and experience authorize; or to form any notions but such as result immediately from comparing the Word of God with his works. And (he adds) I am mistaken if this does not in a little time prove the settled opinion of improved and enlightened Christians <sup>1</sup>.” And a very similar sentiment was delivered long ago by a celebrated prelate of another church, in terms which hardly admit of literal translation, but may perhaps be thus paraphrased. “Placed (as we are, says he) between a spiritual religion

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, vol. iii. p. 295.



which demands our faith, and a material world which addresses our reason ; it is through the exercise of our reason that we must establish our faith<sup>1</sup>." So also our celebrated Bishop Taylor. "In heaven (he says) we must first see and then love : but here on earth we must first love, and love will open our eyes as well as our hearts ; and we shall then see and perceive, and understand."— "In his works (says Bishop Warburton) a man need but open his eyes to see in every object, the God which claims his adoration : in his word, the man who runs may read, the means and method of his own salvation<sup>2</sup>." Some of the purposes of the Almighty, with respect to us, are as unequivocally declared, by the moral and physical properties which he has assigned to us, as by the volume of inspired wisdom, in which we seek for his positive instructions. Thus it is evident, from our wants and our capacities, that we are intended to live in societies, and not to continue in a state

<sup>1</sup> "Placés entre une religion mystérieuse, qui nous dit, croyez—et un monde matériel, qui nous dit, voyez—c'est en voyant qu'il faut apprendre à croire." Fénelon, as quoted by Simond on Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> Divine Legation, vol. vi. 229.

of nature. And all the orders and conditions to which society gives birth, are found or assumed to exist throughout the pages of the Bible. And much of it is employed in prescribing the peculiar duties incumbent upon the various descriptions of men, of which communities consist. No doctrine, therefore, which even by *consequence* unfits us for the world, which would prohibit us from taking a part in its interests, its business, or even its harmless pleasures, can be true. All these things are clearly permitted and sanctioned by the Gospel of Christ, as explained by his Apostles, but under this *one* condition, that they must be *so* regulated, that they may conduce to *the glory of God*. Whether the enthusiasts of the present day would object to any or all of these I know not. But it is certain, that their predecessors of old did not forbear to reproach even *our Saviour himself*, for his compliance with the customs of social life. And the tenets of most modern fanatics are hardly consistent with any indulgence of this sort. If, therefore, the usages of society in this respect can be vindicated, if they can be shewn to be not at variance with the principles of our religion, but on the contrary,

favourable to them; *that* will be fatal to the validity of any notions, which cannot be reconciled with such a course of conduct. I will endeavour, therefore, to establish these two positions. That a religion which tends *to the glory of God*, is friendly to social intercourse. And that the religion of the enthusiast is not friendly to it, and consequently does not tend *to the glory of God*.

It will not be disputed that *the glory of God*, as the moral governor of the world, consists in the obedience of his creatures, as that of an earthly sovereign consists in the submission of his subjects to the laws which he administers. Now the whole of the commandments of God, which relate to our conduct to each other, may be resolved into beneficence. We are to neglect no opportunity of *doing good* to our fellow-creatures, which our several means will permit. It is obvious that this will not be accomplished by a habit of seclusion from the world. We must mix freely with society, in order to acquire the sympathies necessary to influence the will to serve it: and the knowledge requisite to direct the judgment to the proper choice of means for that purpose. — When we consider the multi-

tude of religious and charitable institutions with which this kingdom, and especially this metropolis, abounds; and reflect how large a part of them have been the work of bodies of men, who probably associated originally for very different purposes—to promote their interests, or to contribute to their gratification and amusement—we cannot doubt that such associations have a natural tendency to cherish and to extend some of the best principles of Christianity; and that it is very possible so to conduct them, that by advancing the welfare of man, they may redound to *the glory of God*. Nor can we fail to observe with satisfaction, how much of late years these principles have increased, and are still continually increasing in this country. That purposes of charity, from being *the consequence* of friendly and social intercourse, have come to be one of its chief *causes*, and that people meet together frequently, *apparently* for their *own* enjoyment, but *in reality* to contribute to the welfare of *others*.

The life of a Christian should be an active life. All the images under which it is represented in Scripture point to a state of exertion. It is described as a *warfare*, in which the

utmost vigilance is requisite for our safety: As a scene of *temptation*, which we must manfully resist, and not ignominiously shun. As a theatre for commercial enterprise, in which “the talents” confided to us, must be improved, and not merely be preserved undiminished. All this clearly shews that Christianity is not only adapted to society *in general*, but that its spirit enters intimately into all *its particular relations*: and combines readily with its manners and customs—and this even in cases, with which at first sight it may seem to have no connexion.—What, for instance, it may be said, has religion to do with feasts and entertainments? Yet our Blessed Lord himself did not disdain to be present at them: and even vouchsafed upon one such occasion, to perform a miracle to increase its festivity. Nay more, did not think it beneath him to give directions for the observance of ceremony and precedence at such times. And the Apostle in the text instructs us, that they may not only be harmless in themselves, but may be made to contribute *to the glory of God*, of which the instances to which I have referred, afford, I conceive, no slight illustration. Indeed, it

would involve a plain contradiction, if a religion which is intended to be universal, should not be capable of adapting itself to all the various habits and circumstances of mankind. I look upon it to be a double proof of its Divine original, that it *is* calculated every where to improve society to the utmost: and that ~~society~~ in its turn is destined to be the medium of its universal propagation.

But this is the character of the genuine religion of the Gospel, and not of those spurious kinds which have at different times been engrafted upon it by superstition and enthusiasm. There are several reasons why the religion of the enthusiast is not adapted to social intercourse. *That* calls for the exercise of all the moral duties. But this is a part of religion, which (to say the least) he holds cheap, in comparison with its mysterious points of faith and doctrine. On these he delights to dwell. By these *alone* he fancies he can propitiate the favour of that Divine Being, whose life on earth was a model of practical benevolence, who constantly *went about doing good*. The favourite tenets of most persons of this description, must especially unfit them for society. They must be

apt to consider themselves as too bad, or too good, to consort with their fellow-men.— Their peculiar notions tend to engender a disposition either to gloom and melancholy, or to rapturous but unnatural devotion. Hence the austerities and seclusion of some of the monastic institutions of former times, the legitimate offspring of superstition: and which may well be contrasted with those cheerful and salutary establishments to which I have before alluded, whose undoubted parents are pure morality and enlightened religion.— “Enthusiasm (says an excellent man, whom I have already quoted,) is unfavourable to benevolence: not but that the enthusiast sometimes loves man as well as God; but that his affection is not pleasing and attractive; he is either affectionate to excess, and so disgusts; or he is very morose. He is also too overbearing, too deficient in candour, for any durable connexion: all such are maintained by delicate respect and mutual attentions.— But if even his *brother* differ from him in religion, he is ready to treat him as his enemy, because he is the enemy of God; and to consider him as a proper object of persecution<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Hey's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 184.

Hence the propensity which persons of this turn of mind have to run into sects, to range themselves under the banner of a favourite leader, and to adopt his name as a descriptive appellation. But surely if *they* were to be blamed, who of old declared themselves to be *of Paul, of Apollos, or of Cephas*, much more must *they* be censured, who can profess themselves to belong to a Calvin, a Wesley, or a Whitfield. Christianity knows nothing of any such distinctions. Its object is to unite mankind, and not to divide them. The sectary in the fervor of his zeal, may flatter himself that he is doing *all to the glory of God*—but I fear that he frequently deceives himself; and that his *own glory* is the *real*, though concealed motive of his conduct.

The picture which our Lord has drawn of the Scribes and Pharisees, is in some points not inapplicable to such persons at the present day. *All their works* (says he) *they do to be seen of men*—and *for a pretence, they make long prayers*. But supposing their motives not to be so blamable as these, the *least* we can say is, that they proceed upon very mistaken views of the nature of our religion.—They consider not that the most genuine



method of serving the Almighty, and of promoting his glory, is by contributing to the happiness of his creatures. It should seem that there is something too simple and easy in this, to accord with their lofty notions. Religion in their minds appears to be debased by any admixture with so common a thing as morality. Nothing less than the immediate and perceptible influence of the Holy Spirit, is to be the rule of their conduct. If they are called upon to explain this doctrine, that gives them no trouble. They are not concerned (they say) to explain it. "It is revealed to their faith, and not to their reason." This is their language at the present day, but it is not new. "It is a point we chiefly insist upon (says Mr. Wesley, the pillar and ground of Methodism) that orthodoxy, or right opinion, is at best but a very slender part of religion, if any part of it at all. Here we see (says Bishop Warburton) reason is as it were discarded from the service of religion, and from its attendance on grace: though one part of the office of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into all truth. For when reason is no longer employed to distinguish between right and wrong in opinions, religion hath no further connexion with it.—

And yet if we once agree to separate reason from religion, piety will soon degenerate into superstition or fanaticism. But the piety of the first ages had a different essence: it was then the glory of the Gospel to be a reasonable service<sup>1</sup>." And so it will ever continue to be when rightly understood. But so long as the enthusiast will insist upon doctrines, which so far from being practicable, are not even pretended to be intelligible, he establishes a line of demarcation between himself and other men, he stops the great principle of universal benevolence in its source, he *perverts* that Gospel which he professes exclusively to follow, and to whatever purpose his actions tend, we may safely say, that inasmuch as they do not lead to the benefit of

<sup>1</sup> Warburton's Works, vol. viii. 345.—"Though men are unreasonable, God requires not any thing but reason. They exact a certainty of faith above that of sense or science; God desires only that we believe the conclusion, as much as the premises deserve; that the strength of our faith be equal or proportionable to the credibility of the motives to it." Chillingworth's Religion of Protestants, p. 32.—"He will accept of the weakest and lowest degree of faith, if it be living and effectual to true obedience," p. 33.

mankind, they do not conduce to *the glory of God*.

Let *us*, my brethren, be careful to avoid this error. Let us bear it constantly in mind, that Christianity is a practical religion, and not a mere subject for retired contemplation. Points of faith it has undoubtedly of great importance, but our confidence in *them* will avail us nothing without virtuous conduct. It was objected by an able but deistical writer to the professors of *all* religions, that their actions did not accord with their principles. "Hear (says Mr. Hume) the verbal protestations of all men : nothing so certain as their religious tenets. Examine their lives—you will scarcely think that they repose the smallest confidence in them<sup>1</sup>." Let *us* endeavour to vindicate *ourselves* at least, from this reproach. Whatever we do, whether it be of little or of great moment, let us never forget what is due from the creature to the Creator. If *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work*—if even inanimate and irrational nature, involuntarily

<sup>1</sup> Hume's Essays, vol. ii. 468.

and unconsciously does honour to its great Author—shall the highest order of intelligent being—shall man pre-eminently gifted by his Maker, be backward to render him a suitable homage? Be our lives from henceforth, the answer to this appeal! If he has blessed us with the good things of this world, let us by receiving them gratefully, using them temperately, and imparting them liberally, make the only return in our power for such signal favour, and advance his glory in the manner most conformable to his revealed will. If he has denied us these transient advantages, let us bow with submission to his undoubted wisdom. Let us bear with resignation the lot which he has appointed to us, and by so doing convert a loss which is but *temporal*, into a blessing which will be *eternal*. But of things which pertain *only* to the body, the acquisition is so uncertain, and the possession so short at the longest, that they can be but an imperfect medium for conveying our devotions to the throne of grace, and an inadequate foundation upon which to establish *the glory of God*. It is for higher and more permanent endowments—for the light of reason, and for the splendour of Revelation—

for the means of securing felicity here, and immortal bliss hereafter, that a bountiful Providence should be especially adored, and his praises celebrated in every action of our lives.

To this object then let us devote our serious thoughts, and firmest resolutions—but always under the guidance of sound reason and sober discretion, without suffering our religion to deviate into those extravagances, which are unhappily so frequently exhibited by the fanatics of these days. By keeping it constantly in our view, that we are living under the control of a superintending Providence, who *may* reward or punish us *here*, but who *will infallibly* make us accountable *hereafter*—we may so discipline our minds, that even our most ordinary occupations may be regulated by a regard to the Divine approbation—so that, according to the familiar illustration of the text, *whether we eat, or whether we drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to the glory of God.*

But upon more solemn occasions, this sentiment will naturally be impressed upon us with greater force. In the service in which we are about to be engaged, it especially makes the

most powerful appeal to our hearts. In approaching the table of the Lord, *the glory of God* must be the predominant object of our contemplation. All the stupendous mysteries which the Gospel combines for our redemption and salvation, are, as it were, concentrated in that sublime and sacred office of our Church. We cannot join in it without feeling that spiritual refreshment of our souls, which it is designed to impart. We cannot deliberately and habitually neglect it, without impairing our title to the benefits of the Christian Covenant. Let me earnestly conjure you, therefore, to embrace the present opportunity of partaking in this holy ordinance. If you are conscious that your faith in Christ is firmly fixed, and that your lives are passed in conformity with your faith, gratitude alone for so unspeakable a blessing, must be sufficient to bring you to the altar, in humble acknowledgment of the mercies of your God. But if your faith at any time falls short of that stability and assurance, which it is so desirable to possess, a state of mind from which even the best of men are by no means secure—or if your conduct is not upon all occasions so exactly framed upon Christian principles, as it

might and ought to be—you have still *more* reason to prostrate yourselves before the Lord, in devout supplication for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to guide you into the way of truth, to remove the mists of error from your understandings, and to purify your hearts with the love of virtue : so that when the changes and chances of this mortal life are ended, it may be your happy fate, through the merits of your Redeemer, to behold, with unclouded vision, *the glory of God.*

## SERMON XX.

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1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 13.

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

SUCH is the emphatical conclusion of this great Apostle's description of the virtue of Christian love or charity: to which he justly assigns the pre-eminence over faith and hope; and indeed over every other particular grace and endowment—for this plain reason, that it includes in itself every thing that constitutes the perfection of the Christian character.—The whole chapter is well worthy of the attention of every one, who is desirous of forming correct ideas of the doctrines of our religion. But especially of those, who may, from any causes have been led to attach an exclusive, or an undue importance to faith, as if by *it alone* we could either be justified or



secure our salvation. How they who maintain, that we are esteemed innocent and righteous before God, on account of a certain quality in our minds called faith, and not for our actions, can reconcile that position with the unequivocal superiority which the text assigns to charity (which I shall shew to be a practical principle, demonstrable only by our *actions*) over faith, I profess not to know. But I think their difficulty in so doing will be not a little increased, when they consider that it is the very same Apostle upon whom they principally, if not entirely rely for the support of their doctrine, who has (as I contend) in this admirable chapter furnished us with a complete refutation of it. It is not, however, my present purpose to discuss this topic, important as I at all times deem it to be; but merely to give an exposition of the text, with such practical inferences as will naturally result from it.

In the preceding chapter, St. Paul had discoursed at large to his Corinthian converts, upon the different orders and functions of different men in the infant Church, whether arising from spiritual gifts miraculously imparted to them, or from qualifications naturally

possessed or acquired. This it should seem he did with a view to allay certain jealousies which existed amongst them, about the precedence due to their respective ranks. Having explained to them, by aptly comparing the Church of Christ to the human body, the absolute necessity for a great variety and subordination of members, and the impossibility that all should be of equal value and dignity, he exhorts them nevertheless to *covet earnestly the best gifts*—that is, of prophecy, of miracles, of healing, of tongues, and some others, by which they might become more eminently serviceable to their brethren, and advance the great cause which he had so much at heart. But yet, he adds—that he will *shew unto them a more excellent way* to accomplish that object. And he then proceeds in the chapter before us, to describe very particularly, and to analyse as it were the properties of that charity, which he affirms in the text to be greater than faith or hope, and consequently than any other Christian virtue that can be mentioned.

From a consideration of the various qualities both negative and positive, which the Apostle has enumerated as belonging to

charity, an able writer of our Church has not improperly defined it to be “that affection of the mind, whereby we love God for his own sake, and our neighbour for God’s sake<sup>1</sup>.”— That is—it consists in the observance of those two commandments, namely, the love of God and of our neighbour; upon which our Saviour has assured us, depend *all the law and the prophets*. But practically speaking, these two commandments resolve themselves into one. We have no means of shewing our love to God, but by displaying that feeling towards our fellow-creatures. He is wholly inaccessible to us but through the medium of prayer and praise. But however regularly and fervently we may offer him these external tributes of devotion, they must be deficient in *sincerity*, and consequently *worthless*, if they are unaccompanied by benevolent sentiments and kind actions towards each other. *By this shall all men know that ye are my Disciples, (said Jesus) if ye have love one to another.— If a man say, I love God, (says St. John) and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he*

<sup>1</sup> Dean Stanhope, as quoted in D’Oyly and Mant’s Bible.

*that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?* According to which, it appears that almost all the properties of love or charity mentioned by the Apostle, belong more especially to the love of our neighbour. And because the most obvious, the most general, and the most convenient mode of testifying that love, is by rendering him pecuniary service, the term charity has long been used as equivalent to alms-giving. And as words have great influence over both our thoughts and actions, this has led to very serious and extensive errors. Many persons appear to think, that to give *money* is all that is necessary to be charitable. And others, perceiving this not to be true, go into the opposite extreme, and think that it is *no part* of charity at all. Even very good writers sometimes incautiously express themselves, so as to give some countenance to this opinion: by affirming, when commenting upon this very chapter, that “the grace here so highly recommended, consists, *not in any outward acts*, but in the inward disposition of the heart: and that those acts are no farther of any value, than as they proceed from, and are sanctified by,

this disposition." The latter part of this sentence is indeed true: but the former part appears to be laid down much too broadly: and would naturally lead a selfish and avaricious man to think, that provided he bestowed his pity upon the distressed, did not insult their poverty, nor grossly outrage their feelings: he was guilty of no breach of Christian charity. Such a man might console himself with the reflection, that his conduct was not at variance with many particulars of the doctrine of the Apostle. That his charity (for instance) was of a kind that *envied not—vaunted not itself—was not puffed up, did not behave itself unseemly, was not easily provoked—thought no evil—rejoiced not in iniquity—but rejoiced in the truth.* All this he might fairly say—but still if he was not *kind—if he bestowed none of his goods to feed the poor—or so much of them only as bore no proportion to his ability or his superfluity—his conscience, if it was not utterly dead, must tell him that he was deficient in the most essential part of the virtue under our consideration.*

Will it be said, that this is an imaginary character? If I thought so, I am sure that I

would not have brought it under your notice. But I fear that a very moderate degree of knowledge of the world will be sufficient to convince us, that it is but too faithful a description of a large portion of mankind. And probably it has always been so. That it prevailed amongst the Jews in our Saviour's time to a great extent, is extremely evident. How else can we account for his frequent and impressive declaration of the dangers of great wealth? What is it that makes it so *hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*? Why should *that* which is naturally calculated to *facilitate* his entrance into it, and even in some degree to *anticipate* its enjoyment whilst upon earth; become the fatal cause of his *exclusion* from it? The answer is obvious. It is the abuse of wealth. The almost universal reluctance to part with it: whether arising from the sordid appetite for senseless accumulation, or the insatiable demands of luxury and prodigality. The solicitude which Christianity displays both for the poor and the rich, to mitigate the condition of the former, and to diminish the dangers of the latter, is one amongst its most striking and most amiable features. It is that part of

it which is completely unassailable. It is founded in the natural constitution of things, and not upon any visionary hypothesis. It is calculated to remedy the inherent evils of society, to correct that fearful inequality whose tendency is to encrease with the encreasing prosperity of communities ; so that the period of the greatest elevation of one portion of them, and of the greatest depression of the other would exactly coincide. Does any man doubt this? I would only beg him to consider, what would be the condition of multitudes in these kingdoms at the present moment, when wealth abounds in it beyond all former example, were all the various sources of charity to be suddenly cut off, and every man was left to depend entirely upon what the labour of his hands, or the exercise of his understanding could furnish for his support? What a new organization of society, and new principles of compensation for labour, might effect for the general amelioration of human affairs, I pretend not to know. But so long as things remain as they are, and as they are likely to be, let no man imagine that *that* branch of Christian charity, which consists in giving liberally, *according to his*

*ability*, to those that have need of his assistance, can safely be neglected: or that his duty in this respect can in any degree be satisfied, by an inward disposition of the heart, which does *not* manifest itself by any outward acts of kindness and beneficence.

But as a barren profession of concern and compassion for the distressed does not constitute charity: so neither does mere almsgiving, even though it should be very extensive, deserve that appellation. *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,* (says the Apostle) *and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* Something *more* was necessary in his judgment to the attainment of a virtue of so much excellence. And can we doubt what it was to which he alludes? It was a liberal and a feeling mind. That which prompts a man not only to do all the good that he can to his fellow-creatures: but to do it in a manner the most grateful to the objects of his bounty. To spare them as much as possible. that sense of degradation, which is almost inseparable from pecuniary obligation. To serve them from pure motives, and not from ostentation: and without imputing to them as a fault, that which is probably only



their misfortune. There is a delicacy of sentiment pervading St. Paul's Epistles, when he treats of the social duties and affections, which is very remarkable, and shews that in this respect, that remote age in which he lived, was in no degree inferior to our own, and that he himself was any thing but a stern and harsh enthusiast. It proves moreover, that for this he was indebted to his conversion to Christianity. For previously, whilst he was under the influence of Jewish prejudices and bigotry, he was distinguished for qualities the very reverse of these. What *can* be more pleasing, or more congenial to the best feelings of the human heart, even in *this period* of, perhaps, its greatest moral refinement, than his exhortation to the Romans to the cultivation of the virtue before us? *Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another. Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.* These, and many other observations of a similar kind, dispersed throughout his

writings, discover the true temper and spirit of our religion, and prove that if it were now promulgated for the *first* time, it could not be better adapted to our actual condition and exigencies than it is: and that if it were a merely human institution, in the absence of any other of Divine authority, it would be entitled to our support and veneration, as a powerful instrument of happiness to the human race. Had it merely enjoined the practice of giving relief to the distressed, it would have conferred no small service upon suffering humanity. But in going farther, and requiring that that relief should be given cheerfully, liberally, and with the utmost tenderness and attention to the feelings and circumstances of the afflicted: it has established benevolence upon a firm foundation, and erected upon it a structure of the most admirable beauty and utility.

And in this it has consulted, not only the welfare of the unfortunate, and of those who need assistance: but also the truest interests, both temporal and eternal, of those who are enabled to confer it. For unhappily, it is too often found, that men will catch at any excuse, however frivolous or false, to relieve

themselves from duties of an expensive nature ; and will almost draw arguments from their religion, to justify their selfishness. But how vain would be such an attempt has abundantly appeared. “ If (says Dr. Jortin) rudeness and inhumanity, and harshness of behaviour, be found in Christians, and in Christians who pretend to great holiness, and zeal, and piety, this is not to be laid to the charge of Christianity, or of those who first preached it ; but it is the fault of those who understand not, or are not willing to understand the plain precepts of the Gospel.” And in thus endeavouring to evade them, they not only deprive themselves of all title to its rewards in a future life ; but forego also the purest happiness which the present is calculated to afford. For it is a very just observation of Bishop Butler, that “ they who have got over all fellow-feeling for others, have withal contracted a certain callousness of heart, which renders them insensible to most other satisfactions, but those of the grossest kind.”

It appears then that true Christian charity consists in the union of the most kind, considerate, and liberal sentiments and feelings in our intercourse with each other, and particu-

larly in that which relates to those who may have been less fortunate than ourselves ; with the most generous and cordial exertions for their benefit. Many men may and do display these qualities separately, and flatter themselves perhaps that they are in possession of “that excellent gift, which is the very bond of peace and of all virtues.” But this is a great mistake. He only is a charitable man who combines them both in their fullest extent ; who is not only ready at all times to do the best actions, in the best manner, and from the purest motives : but also to put the fairest construction upon the conduct of others : without, however, running into that excess of candour, which would hardly leave any distinction between right and wrong, but regard with indiscriminate complacency, the most laudable or the most culpable of mankind.— This is not the meaning of the Apostle when he says, that charity *thinketh no evil—but beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things*—however, at first sight, such expressions may seem to convey such an opinion. His doctrine is as consistent with sound sense, as it is with good feeling : and indeed we may well hesitate to admit the truth of any doc-

trine, which is at variance with right reason, except it relate to matters which are entirely beyond the reach of our understandings.— Such matters necessarily exist in religion, whether natural or revealed, and have always been the principal grounds of religious controversies. Men are but too apt to dispute the most about those things which they understand the least: and to display a very intemperate zeal in defending opinions which are unintelligible even to themselves<sup>1</sup>: and even to be willing to punish those whom they cannot convince. But he is not a charitable man who would endeavour to impose forcibly his own creed upon others who cannot receive it, however conscientiously he himself may entertain it: or which amounts almost to the same thing, would visit their refusal with penalties of any description whatsoever. Such conduct cannot be reconciled with the genuine principles of Christianity.— If charity be its very soul and essence (as St. Paul has clearly shewn it is) it will prescribe a conduct the very reverse of this. It would constantly endeavour to bring all Christians, if

<sup>1</sup> See Hey's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 107.

possible, to *the unity of the Spirit*, but at any rate to preserve them *in the bond of peace*.— He who would punish religious error with civil disabilities, *has not, cannot* have attained unto that charity which is so highly extolled as to be preferred even to faith in the Gospel, and the hope of salvation.

It is true, that as charity includes in itself faith, so does faith in its full and proper sense comprehend charity. But the Apostle must have had here in his contemplation another kind of faith: for he declares that *if he had all faith, so that he could remove mountains*, (a figurative expression to denote the strength of his faith) *and had not charity, he was nothing*. So that he evidently considered that there might be a faith, and even a sincere and firm faith, without charity. And this *alone* ought to have been sufficient to have prevented, or at least to have terminated, that tedious controversy about faith and works, which, from his days to our own, has never ceased to be agitated in the Church. What *can* be so clear, as that when he ascribes our salvation to faith, he means a faith *that worketh by love*—that is, which includes charity: which commencing in the head, reaches to the

heart : and pervades all our thoughts, and habits, and actions ? And on the other hand, is it not equally evident, that when St. James denies the power of faith *alone* to save us, he is speaking of a faith which is destitute of charity : a mere barren speculative principle in the mind, as worthless to its possessor, as useless to his fellow-creatures ? There may, therefore, be a faith without charity, but there cannot be charity in a Christian sense without faith. The latter is the root, from which springs that vigorous tree, whose branches bring forth much and good fruit. But if the tree be unproductive, we may be certain that there is some inherent defect in the root, which deprives it of any value whatever.— Hence the superiority of charity over faith is very intelligible. And that it excels hope, scarcely requires to be proved : inasmuch as it is the foundation of that very hope of which the Apostle speaks : which can only be realized hereafter, as he himself explains to the Romans. *For we are saved by hope : but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for ?* The cause is present, and depends in a great measure upon ourselves : the effect is distant,

and inevitably uncertain, though it may be looked to with confidence. For so exalted is the nature of this grace or virtue, that St. John does not scruple to say—that *herein is our love or charity made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment*—and he adds, *there is no fear in love ; but perfect love casteth out fear : because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* Charity, therefore, affords us a degree of assurance of our salvation, to which mere hope can by no means attain.

But the principal ground which appears to have been in the Apostle's contemplation for preferring charity to faith or hope, is its more extended duration. *Charity* (he tells us) *never faileth : but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* That is to say—prophecy shall in due time be accomplished. The gift of tongues will become unnecessary by the diffusion of the Gospel. And knowledge itself will cease, as far as regards this world. All other things are *temporal*, and will have an end—charity alone will be *eternal.* *Faith is the substance of*



*things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* It is the medium of our probation here upon earth: and hope is given us to cheer us on our pilgrimage through this transitory world. But charity rises above this passing scene, nor ceases to soar till it reaches to heaven, and becomes identified with the Deity himself. For *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him.* Of this grace alone, therefore, it can be with truth affirmed, that it is both perfect in its nature, and infinite in its duration. For when faith shall be lost in vision, and hope in fruition—charity will survive, and become the glorious attribute of immortal spirits in the mansions of the blest.

THE END.

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